

A COMPLETE STORY

EVERY WEEK.

By ROBERT LENNOX.



Only instant action could save Wide from burning before their eyes. "Catch the r-rope, swing across the sthreet, and dhrop here!" roared Terry, casting the line over the wires. The young fire captain prepared for the most desperate feat of his career.

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WIDE AWAKE WEEKLY

A COMPLETE STORY EVERY WEEK.

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Young Wide Awake's Call For Help

OR,

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HAROLD G. LORANGE, Danforth Center, N. Y.

SHUT OFF FROM HIS COMRADES

By ROBERT LENNOX

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CHAPTER I.

WIDE TAKES A HAND IN A MEAN GAME.

"How about Terry?" asked Faith, anxiously.

"Oh, he'll be sure to be there," Young Wide Awake replied.

"He said something about going out of town with his mother to-morrow."

"Oh, he'll fix that somehow," declared Wide. "He told me he would. Do you think Terry would miss what may be the only fine dance of our crowd this winter?"

"Then you're sure he'll be on hand?" pressed Faith.

"If he's alive, and able to get about."

"Oh, I'm so glad of that. I want very much to go to the dance, and of course——"

"It would be rather flat, without Terry Rourke," finished Wide for her, nodding smilingly. "Yes, I understand that."

"Why, it would be just like your going to a dance without Kitty, or she going without you," declared Faith.

"Then, if you'll allow me to, I'll answer for Terry."

"I'm awfully glad to hear you say that, Dick."

Faith Vane nodded brightly to her chum's sweetheart, then turned to look down the street.

Having seen our hero from a street car, as she was going uptown from the railway station, Faith had signalled and alighted.

Some of the pleasantest young people of Belmont were getting up a subscription dance, which was to be given in Eagle Hall the night of the next day.

As the plans had been made quickly, the young people

had found it needful to get their arrangements through with a rush.

But now Faith Vane's mind was satisfied.

It was the young ladies who were making up the lists, and on them devolved the getting up of this first "leap-year" affair of 1908.

"Going uptown now?" asked Wide, following Faith's glance.

"Yes; just as soon as the car comes along. I'm in a hurry. You're rather far downtown, aren't you?"

"Yes; I'm headed on a walk to the further side of the bridge and back. Here comes your car, Faith. I'll put you aboard."

"Remember, you've promised for Terry," reminded Faith, as Wide helped her up the car-step.

"And I'll keep my promise. Never fear."

As the car went ahead again, and Wide turned to take up his stroll once more, there was a pleased smile on his face.

He was fond of dancing, and proud of the fact that he was to be the chosen partner of a girl like Kitty Lester, whom he regarded as the most beautiful of all the girls in Belmont.

"Just to think," he muttered, "that, a year ago, I knew her only by sight. In that time I've become captain of a 'crack' fire company, and the favored admirer of a girl like Kitty Lester. It looks to me as though I'm one of the luckiest fellows alive! I hope it isn't as Joe sometimes hints, that people who have a long string of luck come to the turning! Hullo, what's this?"

A little girl's scream had just come to his ears, from one of the side streets.

Wide stopped, taking a quick, sharp look at a strange scene that was being enacted.

Into a buggy a man of about forty had just tossed a sobbing, but defiant-eyed, boy of eight.

The same man was now lifting a little girl of six, who was shrieking as though her heart would break.

Several people were hurrying to doors or windows, but Wide, never waiting after he grasped the meaning of the scene, went sprinting down that side street.

The man had just tossed the screaming girl into the buggy, and was addressing some angry words to the badly-frightened little miss.

He was about to spring into the buggy, when the young fire captain caught him by the arm, dragging him back to the sidewalk.

"Get out of here, meddler!" ordered the fellow, harshly.

"Not until I know that this is all right," retorted Young Wide Awake.

"Get back, or I'll brain you, then!" hissed the man.

The next thing that happened must have been a surprise to him.

For Young Wide Awake, far from dreading that he would be harmed, seized the fellow by the throat, thrusting him back against the wall of a building.

"I'll make you ache for this," snarled the fellow, shaking himself free just as he landed so forcibly against the wall.

"I don't want to meddle with you, if you're doing right," retorted Young Wide Awake. "But I want to be sure of it—that's all. Why are you thrusting the children into your buggy?"

"Because they're my kids—that's why!"

"Are you telling me the truth?"

"Of course I am."

The man was passably well-dressed, but there was more than an ordinary smell of liquor on his breath.

He had a dissipated look, through and through, and his eyes, instead of having a calm, straightforward look, were those of a quarrelsome fellow.

The boy in the buggy had not been idle, in the meantime.

For a moment he watched Wide and the man curiously.

Then, slipping the reins up from their place around the buggy's dasher, the youngster suddenly urged the horse forward.

"Here, there! Whoa!" roared the man.

He slipped past Wide, then ran down the street, after the horse and buggy containing the children.

By this time several of the neighbors had come out.

Until the man fled away they remained at a distance, as though in dread of the fellow.

"That's Jimmy Hunt," now called a woman across the street.

Wide had never heard of Jimmy Hunt, but he called back:

"Is he the father of those children?"

"Oh, yes."

"Then I've butted into the wrong game," muttered the young fire captain to himself.

Aloud he asked:

"What made the children object, then?"

"Oh, the worthless fellow ran away from his poor wife a couple of years ago. He never does anything for the family,

and the children hate their father, as they've got every right to do."

"That's true," added another neighbor.

The crowd, composed mostly of women, had now gathered around Wide.

"Still," said Wide, "I suppose no one can really prevent the man from claiming his own children."

"Can't they, though?" snorted another woman. "The court gave Mrs. Hunt the sole custody of her children."

"Then why didn't some of you people come out and tell me so?" Young Wide Awake demanded, looking around him.

"Oh, we don't any of us want trouble with Jimmy Hunt."

"Is he such a bad one? A dangerous man?"

"He's done time for trying to kill a man," supplied one neighbor.

"He's been in jail for other things."

"He ain't afraid to do anything wicked."

"He's the most dangerous man I ever heard of."

"Jimmy Hunt will do anything, and fear nothing, when he has a bit of liquor aboard."

"Here's hoping the children got good and away from a father like that," uttered Wide.

Down the street another scream sounded.

A woman attired only in calico house garments came running up the sidewalk.

"Here's Mrs. Hunt, now," observed one of the neighbors, in a low voice. "Someone's told her, I guess."

Mrs. Jimmy Hunt was a still rather pretty woman of about thirty.

The threaded needles thrust into the bosom of her dress, and the scissors she still carried in her hands gave an inkling of the dressmaking work by which she kept her little home together.

"Where's that scoundrel? Where are my Tommy and Ethel?" cried the good woman, wailingly. "Did that scoundrel get away with them?"

For answer a buggy turned the corner, the horse coming along at a walk, with Master Tommy holding to the reins, and Ethel, trying bravely to smile again, sitting at her young brother's side.

On the sidewalk strode Jimmy Hunt, fiercely, his ugliness, however, kept in check by the policeman who gripped his arm.

"They've got him," muttered a woman. "Good! I'm going to get out of this muss, though."

She fled for some distance, while many others got safely behind their doors.

"They're all afraid of that man," muttered Mrs. Hunt, scornfully.

"Are you?" asked Wide, curiously.

"When I'm alone with him, of course," admitted Mrs. Hunt, her gaze now wholly on her returning children. "I've got reason enough to fear him. He's tried two or three times to kill me, and swears he'll do it yet. That big brute wants me to support him in my home, and find his drink money."

Jimmy Hunt glared at his wife, and at our hero, as he was marched up to the spot.

It would be hard to say which he favored with looks that showed the most hate.

"This is Mrs. Hunt, the fellow's wife," nodded Wide, as the policeman and his prisoner came up.

"You bet that's Mrs. Hunt," snarled the prisoner. "One of these days, soon, she'll be nothing, though!" he added, harshly.

The poor little woman shrank back under the ugly looks with which her husband regarded her.

"And there's the meddler," rasped Hunt, "who got between me and my business. That boy'll wish he'd never been born before he gets through with me!"

"Maybe you'll wish the same thing," laughed the policeman, "if you mix it up with that young man."

He favored Wide with a friendly nod, then asked:

"What was all the trouble about?"

"Why, I understand that that fellow is this woman's husband, but that she had the custody of her children, given her by the courts," Wide replied. "Hunt was slamming the children into the buggy, and they were screaming, when I came up."

"And butted in?"

"Just that," nodded Wide, laughing.

"Good for you, my boy! Now, Mrs. Hunt, let's hear what you have to say?"

"Why, a neighbor came and told me that Jimmy was trying to steal the children," replied Mrs. Hunt, nervously, under her husband's baleful glare.

"Have you the only legal right to the children?" asked the officer.

"Jimmy abandoned me, two years ago. Then he came back and threatened to steal the children if I didn't give him a home and support him. So I hid the children and went to court. The judge ordered him to keep away, and gave me the sole charge of my little ones."

"Then," replied the policeman, "I'd advise you, Mrs. Hunt, to have this husband of yours locked up, and we can take him before the same judge to get his medicine."

"I'd like to do that," admitted Mrs. Hunt, looking doubtfully at the ugly brute with the bad record who was still her husband.

"Yes, you will!" sneered Hunt.

"Shut up!" ordered the policeman, with a scowl.

"This is a free enough country, so you can't stop a man talking," growled the prisoner.

But the policeman turned to the woman.

"Mrs. Hunt, take your children to some neighbor, then get on your street clothes and come back here."

"What are you going to do?" asked the woman, in a voice that faltered not a little.

She was trying not to look at her husband, who scowled at her in a way that was meant to break down her nerve.

"Why, Mrs. Hunt, it seems to me," replied the officer, "that the only thing to do is to have this idle beast locked up for trying to abduct your children. We can put him away for a couple of years, anyway."

"Molly Hunt, if you do," warned her husband, gruffly, "you'll never know another safe day, for yourself or the kids, as long as you or they are on earth!"

"And I guess we can put him away for a little while longer for making threats," nodded the officer, grimly.

"Wide, you heard the threats?"

"Yes," nodded our hero.

But Mrs. Hunt seemed suddenly to have gone to pieces with dread.

"I—I—I don't think you'd better lock him up," pleaded the poor woman, nervously.

"Oh, nonsense, madam. Come, now!" protested the policeman. "This beast ought to be locked up for as long as he can be put away. You're not altogether safe with him at large."

"You'll let us alone after this, Jimmy, if I don't make a complaint now, won't you?" begged the little woman, almost tearfully.

"I suppose I'll have to, if you say so," grumbled Hunt, ungraciously.

The policeman, familiar though he was with such scenes, began to look more disgusted.

"Come, now, Mrs. Hunt, women like you make our work doubly hard. This man deserves to be put away."

"I—I won't have it," replied the woman, in a voice that was still scared.

"I—I guess I can put him away, for the threats I heard him utter," said the officer, slowly. "You heard him, too, Captain Halstead?"

"I most certainly did," Wide agreed.

"Then come along," ordered the cop, giving a tug at Jimmy Hunt's arm.

But Mrs. Hunt threw herself before the officer, pleading:

"Don't! don't! Let him go, please. Jimmy's not such a bad man, except for his laziness, and his drinking sometimes."

"But, woman, he threatened your life. We heard that."

"He didn't mean it. I'll tell the judge so, if you take him in," protested Mrs. Hunt.

Policeman Oswald looked utterly disgusted, as, in truth, he was.

Such cases are almost of everyday occurrence on a busy beat. The officer soon gets to know, however, that the courts will do little when the wife appears to plead for her husband.

"Do you really want this brute to go free?" demanded Officer Oswald, sternly.

"Oh, yes, yes, please! Jimmy didn't mean any real harm. He gets cross streaks once in a while, but he doesn't mean so very much. He'll go away, and stay away, I know, if he really says he will."

"Oh, yep. I'll clear out and stay cleared," promised Mr. Hunt, readily enough.

"Then you're sure you don't want to prosecute, madam?"

"Very, very sure."

The policeman let go of his man with a snort of rage.

"Get out of this, then, Hunt. Let's see how fast you can go. And get out of Belmont, too, if you're wise. If I catch you at anything you can be lugged in for, I'll get a whole lot of pleasure out of making you march to the jug. Git, now!"

Without even a look at his wife, but with a sidelong glance at the two children, who were looking on from the halted buggy, Jimmy Hunt went rapidly away.

"That horse looks as though he came from Farnald's livery," remarked the cop, looking over the rig. "I'll telephone and find out. You help the kids down, Halstead, and watch the horse, while I go to the 'phone."

As Wide placed the youngsters on the sidewalk, Mrs. Hunt, sobbing softly, kissed them both.

"Were you really afraid to prosecute your husband?" asked Wide, looking at her.

"Oh, yes, yes! Altogether afraid," she admitted. "He might have been sent away for two or three years, but he'd have done nothing else in those years but plan what to do to us all when he got out. No one knows better than I do how ugly and wicked Jimmy Hunt can be!"

"But he'll get the children again, anyway, won't he?" asked Wide.

"Not if I have time to get them with a friend where they'll be safe."

"You'd better ask the policeman to go there with you, hadn't you?" suggested Wide.

"I believe I will. It isn't far."

The officer was soon back.

"It's Fernald's rig, all right, and he says he'll pay a half-dollar to the fellow who brings the rig back. Want to earn the money, Wide?"

"No objection," said the young fireman. "Mrs. Hunt thought of asking you to go with her to where she wants to leave her children for the present."

"Where is it?" asked the officer.

The woman told him.

"It's on the next beat. But I'll go with you to the end of my beat, and rap for my side partner," offered the man behind the brass buttons.

Wide, therefore, jumped into the buggy, turning into Main street and going uptown.

It was an easy way of picking up pocket money, and Wide had no objections to doing it.

Having left the rig and pocketed his half-dollar, Halstead went again to Main street, looking for some of the Washington fire crew, for this forenoon in the holidays was still young.

None of the fellows appeared to be around on Main street just then, however.

Wide had not been standing at one of the corners long, however, when Jimmy Hunt slouched up to him, glaring in an ugly fashion.

"Haven't you taken good advice, and slipped town yet?" Wide asked, laughingly.

"No; and I'm not going to yet, either," came the hoarse, low-toned answer. "I'm going to wait to have something to say to you—something that'll set you thinking for the rest of your life!"

"Can't you say it now?" asked Wide, contemptuously.

"I'll say it when there ain't so many around," returned Hunt, with a meaning look at the crowds on the street.

"You'd better use your leisure in getting away from town," advised Young Wide Awake, calmly. "The police are trying to find something they can fix on you without having to depend on your wife."

"All right," retorted Jimmy Hunt, meaningly. "They'll have something they can fix by the time that I'm through with you."

"Oh, bosh!" jeered Wide, fearlessly.

Jimmy's sudden answer was to growl and to snatch an empty bottle from one of his pockets.

This, without stopping much to aim, he hurled at Wide's head.

As the young fire captain dodged, Jimmy leaped at him, bearing him off his balance to the sidewalk.

Before Wide could get up the fellow gave him a kick, next darted through a hallway door, snapping the spring-lock as Halstead got to his feet to pursue and square matters.

The bottle had crashed on the sidewalk, the jagged pieces of glass giving an idea of what would have happened to our hero's face had the bottle been splintered there instead.

"He's an ugly customer, all right," muttered Wide, as he threw himself in vain, against the closed door. "The fellow hadn't planned that trick at all. It shows what an ugly thing a trick would be that he did really plan."

Wide did not run around the rear of the building, for he knew that Hunt would have plenty of time to get away from there.

"If he thinks I'm afraid of him," decided the young fire captain, "he's more likely to come around this way again. Then maybe I won't try to pounce on him! You saw that, didn't you, Mr. Allen?"

"I saw a fellow try to throw the bottle in your face," replied the man addressed.

Others who had stopped showed by their looks that they had seen what had happened.

"I'm hoping he'll think I'm afraid and show up here again," said Young Wide Awake, coolly.

Hunt, however, did not put in another appearance, just then.

Terry Rourke and Lieutenant Hal Norton did come up, however, within a few minutes.

Wide told them what had happened.

"Oh, give him a bit av toime," hinted Terry, "and he'll leave town. Them wife-beaters ar-re not much on fighting men!"

Finding things dull here on Main street, the young firemen went down to the Washington fire station.

Here they found it even duller, but the big armchairs, pulled up before the well-filled stove, proved comfortable enough until—

Clang! clang!

Zing! Zing!

With that sharp summons over the fire alarm system young firemen came dashing into the fire station who had not seemed to be anywhere around a few minutes before.

There was desperate work ahead of them this January morning.

CHAPTER II.

THE YOUNG FIREMAN'S MOST DESPERATE FEAT.

"All ready! Swing on, enginemmen!" yelled Joe, as he dashed to the head of the pole of Washington No. 1.

"Hustle, hosemen!" followed up Terry.

"Now, then, Washington, roll 'em out!" ordered Wide, as he and Hal raced to the head of the company, with young Ted Lester just at our hero's heels.

Quite a little crowd had gathered to see this pet company of Belmont leave its fire station.

A cheer started as they came out, travelling fast and making a most gallant sight.

The box call came from far downtown, but the Wash-

ingtons, all clever runners, covered the distance in a short time.

It was a tall tenement-house building that was afire, burning fiercely as all such structures do when they are old and of tinder-like wood.

In this district Neptune No. 2 did not answer, and Torrent No. 1 came only on second or special call.

Fire Chief Pelton drove rapidly up to the scene just before the Washingtons arrived.

"It's going to be a nasty fire," he muttered, as he gazed up at it, for the flames were in the upper portion of the tall building. "I've got to watch my young firemen, or I'll lose some of them up in that high old shell."

Hearing the Washington running-bell at the corner, Chief Pelton decided to wait for his young captain before going up into the building.

Many tenants had already come out of the building, and two policemen had hustled inside and upstairs to make sure that all were out.

Just as the Washingtons came springily up Wide saw one of the policemen come running out with a little woman in his arms.

She was unconscious, overcome by the smoke.

"Why, it's Mrs. Hunt!" gasped Wide.

"Come along, captain. You, too, Rourke," called Chief Pelton.

Both young firemen hurried after their leader, while Ted kept close behind Captain Halstead, as a matter of course.

As they ran up the stairs a horrible suspicion was running through Wide's mind.

"That infernal brute, Hunt, is really a desperate man. He must have fired this house to destroy his wife. The beast! Oh, it's awful!"

They met the other policeman on the stairs. He was coming down empty-handed, reporting that everyone was now out.

There was no passing up the back stairs to the roof, for the fire was on the top floor, and the back stairs were engulfed in the flames.

Forward was another narrow stairway, leading up to a scuttle.

"Run that hose up here—top floor!" bellowed Pelton, raising a window and thrusting his head out.

Hal was ready with it, and along came nozzlemen and linemen behind the young lieutenant of the Washingtons.

"Ye'll be needing axes up here, too, Oi'm thinking, chief," broke in Terry Rourke.

Pelton nodding, Rourke leaned out of the window, giving the order that started another squad of Washingtons up.

It was a hot box right at the start.

From the top floor the flames traveled downward into the story below.

The progress of the fire to the roof was now rapid.

Terry led his men up there, Wide going with them to watch, while Chief Pelton remained on the floor below to watch the work of the stream.

It was all they could do, however, to keep their places, either on the roof, or just below.

The hosemen were blinded by the smoke that belched out at them.

On the roof the axemen seemed in momentary danger

of being roasted by the flames that burned through under their feet.

"'Tis a game of hop-sotch!" grumbled Rourke, as he stopped swinging his axe to side-step away from a spot where it was getting too warm for his feet.

"We've got to have Torrent's help here," uttered Wide. "We can never handle this thing alone."

At this moment Chief Pelton showed his head through the scuttle.

"Axemen down!" he called. "The roof's likely to give way under you."

"Are you sending for Torrent, sir?" asked Wide.

"I've got to," replied the chief. "Run to the edge of the roof and pass down the order."

Under the fire chief's order Terry and his axe and pikemen ran to the scuttle, slipping through.

Pelton followed them, while Wide was standing at the street edge of the roof to yell down:

"Joe, send a fellow to pull in a second."

"What's that?" Darrell called up, with one hand to an ear.

"Pull in a second alarm."

Young Wide Awake was about to turn and run back to the scuttle when he received a sudden jar.

A man who had just hurried up in the street, and who stood looking up curiously, caught our hero's glance.

It was Jimmy Hunt, most of the fierce look gone that Wide had last seen under the mass of brownish hair and behind the bristling red mustache.

"He wasn't in time to see his wife taken down, and he's wondering what has happened to her!" throbbed the young fire captain.

Then, bringing his trumpet to his lips, forgetful of all else in that instant of anger, the young fire captain bellowed below:

"Oswald! Officer Oswald! There's that fellow, Hunt. Hadn't he ought to be grabbed on suspicion of setting this fire?"

But Oswald did not hear the first of it, and had to ask to be told over again.

Hunt, however, did hear the very first.

He made a rapid dash through a building, Wide pointing after him.

Down in the street Chief Pelton, Rourke and his axe squad and Ted Lester broke from the building, following those with the hose.

"Good heavens, Halstead! Ain't you down yet?" roared Pelton, through his trumpet. "Come down, quick, while there's a living chance!"

The call of the second alarm was finishing.

Wide turned, racing toward the scuttle.

Up through that opening the thick smoke was belching.

Our hero knew how the smoke and hot air center around such an opening, and dreaded the plunge down through.

Just as he reached the scuttle, holding one hand over his mouth and nostrils, ready to make the dive for safety, Young Wide Awake was driven back by a sheet of flame that leaped up almost in his face.

"Great Scott! I can't get down through there!" gasped the young fireman.

He paused, for an instant, to see whether the flames would subside.

Then, as they did not, he ran back to the street edge of the roof, shouting down news of his plight through his trumpet.

"I call for help! I've got to have it!" he shouted.

It was quite impossible to run up one of the long ladders.

In the first place, it would take some time to get such a long ladder as would be needed in position.

The flames were leaping out from the front of the house in a way that showed what short work the fire would make of the ladder.

Wide, as he stood there, watching his chances and waiting for a word from Pelton, saw Terry Rourke talking fast to the fire chief.

Quickly Pelton's trumpet rose to his lips.

"Run to the rear edge of the roof!" came Pelton's order.

"Wait for Foreman Rourke, who says he can reach you and get you away."

Wide did not exactly run.

The roof was so unsafe by now that it was necessary to pick his footing with great care.

"Lord, but I've got to get away from here mighty fast, if at all," groaned the startled young fire captain. "Any moment this wholerroof may crash in."

Here at the rear the smoke and flames were hardly less terrifying.

"I hope Terry's not relying on rigging a ladder across to me," gulped down Wide, as he looked. "I couldn't get through this whirlwind of fire."

As he gazed hard across the street at the roof from which he must expect the only help that could possibly save his life, Wide saw, first of all, a girl's hair-crowned head poke up through the scuttle.

Then, through the smoke, our hero sighted the sweet face of Amy Moulton.

"Why, that's the house she lives in," breathed the young fire captain to himself, as he waved a hand to Hal's true sweetheart.

"Keep up your grit," she shouted, her hands to her mouth as she stepped hastily to the roof. "Your comrades are coming!"

Then the bared head of Terry Rourke flashed for an instant at the scuttle.

In another second the whole of Rourke's body came nimbly to the roof.

The Irish lad ran across the roof, a coil of rope in his hands, while Hal, Phil and others piled up into sight almost as if they had been shot up, so desperate was their haste.

They saw their young captain, framed in the dense clouds of smoke, lighted up by the leaping flames—shut off from them by a gulf that was utterly impassable unless they could provide the bridge.

Over the street between the two buildings ran a nest of telegraph wires.

It was on these wires that Rourke desperately depended.

Only instant action could save Wide from burning before their eyes.

"Catch the r-rope, swing across the sthreet, and dhrop here!" roared Terry, casting the line over the wires.

The young fire captain prepared for the most desperate feat of his career.

CHAPTER III.

JIMMY HUNT'S TRICK.

As the rope came, falling a little behind him, Young Wide Awake bounded backward.

He caught it, and a cheer went up from his frantic comrades, as they saw him come springing forward, holding to the line with both hands.

"Listen, Wide!" yelled Hal, through his trumpet. "Come straight to the edge of the roof. Make a running start the instant you move. Rely on us to haul the rope in shorter so that you don't strike against the front of this building. Get that?"

Wide, who had let his trumpet fall at his back as he took the rope in both hands, nodded.

Then he made the signal which served the Washingtons for "ready" in just such emergencies as this.

Watching with strained attention, while Amy Moulton, her hands clasped in wild anxiety, stood out of sight behind them, the young Washingtons saw Wide take the first step of his running start.

Amy darted to one side, out of the way of the back-coming young firemen, who leaped as they saw Young Wide Awake's feet bound from the roof opposite.

They had done all they could, these young firemen, standing back, arms straight out as they held to the rope.

The time that Wide swung in the air between the two roofs seemed to them like an age.

Would it never end?

Just as they wondered, Halstead landed on his feet at the roof edge.

Any loosening at the rope might yet have let him fall backward into the street, for his feet had come ahead of his body.

But those fine comrades on the rope never faltered nor bungled.

Wide pulled his arms forward by a hitch, since he could no longer rely on the rope.

He had the presence of mind to sink quickly to his knees.

Then he threw himself forward on his face—and was safe!

"Oh, heaven be thanked!" cried Amy, turning very white, now, and tottering.

In the next instant Wide, though his face was still pallid, was among them, thanking them.

It was necessary for Hal to help Amy down through the scuttle.

As the others followed, Terry last of all and proudly carrying his coiled rope, they heard the clatter of Torrent No. 1's running-bells in the other street.

"That was the closest squeak I ever had," muttered Wide, waiting for his chum at the foot of the scuttle steps.

"Bedad, av ye have annything wor-rse befall yet, we'll be having a new iliction for captain," grunted Rourke, who hated to show emotion, now that his chum was safe.

"That roof we've come from will be a good one to fight the fire from," declared Wide, as he passed the others on the stairway in his eagerness to report to the fire chief.

Pelton took the same view that Wide did of rushing the Washington hose up through the building by which he had escaped.

From this roof they played upon the roof and sides of the burning building opposite, and through the windows, breaking the glass with the force of their stream.

The Torrents, on their part, played upon the front of the building at first, then made their way up the lower stairs inside.

It was twenty minutes ere the firemen of both companies were able to make any real headway against the fire.

Even after that it was another half hour before the fire was subdued.

The upper two stories were destroyed, while the lower floors were considerably damaged.

The firemen had done well, however, to save any portion of the building.

All this time Wide was wondering whether Mrs. Hunt had recovered from her injuries by smoke.

As soon as the hose was reeled in, our hero and Terry left the company, Hal taking command on the trip back to the fire station.

Wide and Rourke hastened around to the drug-store to which the unlucky mother had been taken.

Here they were glad to find that she had recovered consciousness. The poor woman was resting in a big chair.

"I'm glad to see you out all right, Mrs. Hunt," said Wide.

"Out? Yes; that's just about all of it," cried the woman, bitterly. "I'm out my poor little home; out the work that my customers had left with me. Out of everything in the world, in fact."

"Except your children," hinted Wide.

"And a hyena in human form trying to get at them," shuddered the woman.

"They're safe, though, and that must be a comfort," went on Wide. "Mrs. Hunt, how did you come to be caught in the house?"

"Why, I was worn out with the excitement of the morning, and lay down for a nap. I must have been sound asleep when the policeman found me."

"Have you any idea, Mrs. Hunt, that your husband, in one of his mad rages, may have set the house afire in order to destroy you?"

Mrs. Hunt went white with fright.

"That must have been how it happened," she cried. "Oh, now I understand it! The villain!"

"Your husband showed up at the fire, but got away when the police went after him," Captain Halstead continued.

"How did they guess—the police?"

"I called their attention to your husband."

"Oh! Did he know that you raised the suspicion against him?"

"He must have known, for he couldn't help hearing me call to Officer Oswald."

Mrs. Hunt looked at the young fire captain with pitying eyes.

"Oh, that was too bad, too bad!" she groaned. "Jimmy will be sure to hunt you up and pay you back, then. He was always bound to be revenged on those who did him a bad turn. That was why I didn't dare to have him arrested this morning."

"He'll be arrested, all right," predicted Young Wide Awake. "He's busy, now, trying to keep away from the police. That is, if he hasn't been caught since we came here."

"He won't be caught easily," said the woman, with a scared face. "And he always used to carry weapons, to make a fight when any one tried to catch him. I don't know whether he has changed any lately. But, oh, Captain Halstead, I'm utterly worried for your safety if Jimmy hasn't been caught!"

"Tis yure husband's safety Oi'm worrying about, av he goes up agin Wide," grinned Terry.

"Oh, young man, you don't know that wicked husband of mine, or you wouldn't joke about him," cried Mrs. Hunt, piteously.

They could do no more here, nor learn any more, and were only opening the woman's griefs afresh.

So Wide gave the signal, and they left. Besides, Wide was in a hurry to communicate all he had learned to Chief Pelton.

They found that official at fire headquarters, and to him they told the whole story.

The result was that Chief Pelton asked Chief Sharp, of the police, to arrest Jimmy Hunt, wherever found, on a suspicion of the crime of setting the building afire.

Then the young firemen went to the Washington fire station, where they changed their uniforms for ordinary clothing.

"I've a notion," said Wide, "to go to where the Hunt children were sent and just make sure that they're all right. Besides, Jimmy Hunt may be found hanging about that neighborhood."

"Ye're mighty anxious to see him caught, ain't ye?" asked Rourke.

"Yes, for I believe he set that fire. Then, again, the fellow has it in for me, and I'll admit that I'd feel easier if I knew he was under lock and key."

"Bedad, Oi can undherstand thot," muttered Terry. "Av the schoundhrel was bad enough to set a fire like thot, thin he'd be bad enough to do annything else thot came his wicked way."

The Hunt children had been sent to the home of a carpenter named Ellis, that man and his wife being old friends of Mrs. Hunt.

Here the youngsters would probably be safe enough, for Ellis was a lusty man, not afraid of fighting, and his shop was right in the rear of his home.

"The Hunt children?" asked Mrs. Ellis, as soon as she knew who her two visitors were. "You'll find them out in the shop with my husband."

As Wide and Terry entered the shop, treading on the shavings, the first fact they noticed was that the shop was empty.

There was a rear door.

To this they hurried, throwing it open.

Down at the back of the yard a man was busy turning over a pile of boards.

"Mr. Ellis!" called Wide.

"Yes?"

"Where are the Hunt children?"

"Why——"

Then, as if suddenly afraid, the carpenter raced up the yard, almost leaping into the shop.

"Why, I left them here!" he gasped. "Told 'em not to go out of the shop. They must be in the house with my wife."

"Mrs. Ellis sent us out here to find 'em," returned Wide. Ellis looked astounded.

"Oh, they must be in the house," he retorted, sharply.

He raced toward the house, while the two young firemen looked carefully about the shop and the yard.

"They're gone!" yelled Ellis, returning at a run. "Why, I wasn't out of the shop more'n two or three minutes!"

"Perhaps these shavings show that they've gone that way," observed Wide, pointing to two or three shavings that lay along the path to the gate.

The shavings, which were small ones, looked as though they might have been dropped from shoes or trousers.

At the gate they found a small chip. Eight or ten feet to the southward was another little chip.

There were still other tiny fragments of wood a little more to the southward.

"Those children are gone, but they never went away alone!" declared Ellis, excitedly. "Boys, I'm going to run for the police station and give the alarm. Coming?"

"No," said Wide. "We'll keep on in this direction, fast, and see if we can catch any sight of the youngsters."

"You'll find someone else with them—their worthless father," shot back Ellis over his shoulder.

That startled carpenter ran as though pursued.

Wide and Terry started south at a run.

"The scoundrel is as clever and daring as he is ugly," raged Wide, as they raced along. "How he must have hung about that place, to find out that Ellis was down in the yard."

"And the chances he took av Mrs. Ellis seeing him go by their house," muttered Terry, wonderingly. "But how could he keep thim childer quiet? Shur-re, they made noise enough the toime before."

"He frightened them, in some way, of course," Halstead answered. "Oh, it must have been easy enough for a fellow who had his plan all thought out to find some way of frightening them."

As they ran, the young firemen had their eyes open for the sight of more tell-tale chips or small shavings, but they saw none.

Looking eastward, at a street corner, they thought they caught just a fleeting glimpse of a man and two small children turning a street corner to the eastward.

"Terry, I'm sure that was Jimmy Hunt and his youngsters," cried Young Wide Awake, excitedly.

"Av our wind holds out we'll soon know," was the Irish lad's rejoinder.

After some hard running they reached that particular corner.

Here, as provoking luck would have it, they were just in time to see a man and two small children turn another corner.

"That's the scoundrel, I'll swear to it!" exclaimed Wide, making the most of the second he had for observing Jimmy Hunt.

To that other corner they ran.

By the time they got there they were in time to see a man and a boy and girl entering an old shanty that stood in a big field down by the river.

"There they are!" exclaimed Wide, positively. "And it looks as though they were going to stop there for a little while. Terry——"

"Oi'm wid yez for jumping the rascal, now!" breathed Rourke, his eyes gleaming excitedly.

"I don't know about jumping him," said Wide, more cautiously. "From what Mrs. Hunt told us, that fellow is likely to be armed. We'll show more sense, Terry, if we send for the police to do the arresting."

"All right for thot idea, either, then," returned Rourke, obligingly. "Oi'm the lad thot'll go 'phone for the cops, av yez'll kape an eye over the shanty."

"Hurry, then, Terry, and I'll stand on guard here."

Rourke was off as fast as he could go after his long run.

Wide, after concealing himself as best he could, though keeping a close eye on the shanty, looked about at the neighborhood.

Only a few of the buildings about here seemed to be tenanted at all.

"There'll be only women at home at this time of the day," muttered Halstead, who knew that the time was now well past the lunch hour. "I can't call women out on such business. Oh, for just a glimpse, now, at three or four men not afraid of trouble!"

He might as well wish for the moon at noonday as to expect men in this thinly-settled part of the town.

From the shanty into which Jimmy Hunt had disappeared there came no sound or other sign.

Wide finally decided that he could get much closer without being detected, so he tried it.

He had gotten within a few feet of the shanty wall, when he heard a step at one side.

"So it's you, meddler, eh?" leered the harsh voice of Jimmy Hunt. "Won't you come into my parlor, as the spider said to the fly?"

Wide would have fallen back, but in Jimmy's right hand, which he held carelessly at his side, gleamed a revolver.

"You see," chuckled Jimmy, "I've got what is known as the drop. Step lively into the house. In such matters I never speak more'n once."

There being no help for it, Wide stepped around to the door, with the ugly muzzle of that weapon staring at him all the time.

"Here's the key," announced Jimmy Hunt, throwing it on the ground in front of our hero. "Unlock the door and step inside. Remember, I'm close behind you all the time!"

Young Wide Awake had to do exactly as he was ordered.

The inside of the shanty proved to consist of one room.

In a corner, huddling in the space between the joining walls, stood Tommy and Ethel.

Both were white-faced, and the girl was shaking with fear.

"You see, children," announced Jimmy Hunt, laughing wickedly, "I've brought you some company. Tommy, place that chair in the middle of the room."

The boy's rebellious eyes gleamed as though he would like to disobey his father, but he didn't dare to.

So the little fellow lifted the only chair there was in the squalid room and placed it where Jimmy Hunt ordered.

"Sit down on the chair, Halstead," ordered Jimmy, in a tone that thrilled with delight.

Wide hesitated, for a moment, but saw that the muzzle of the weapon was turned full on him, and obeyed.

"Of course," mocked Hunt, "you won't be reckless

enough to try to do anything disagreeable while I'm tying you."

How Wide ached to jump up, when Hunt knelt behind him, and bring that chair down on the fellow's head!

Hunt, however, knew that his victim would not dare take any chances as long as the revolver was held right.

With a few dextrous turns of a cord Jimmy Hunt had the young fire captain lashed to the chair.

The fellow's next move was to drive two stakes into the dirt floor.

To these the chair legs were lashed.

"Now, I don't believe you'll really get away," declared Hunt, lightly. "So, now, meddler, I want to ask you a question or two."

"Go ahead," replied Wide, hoping to gain time until Terry could get there with the police.

"On second thought, though," Jimmy Hunt went on, blithely, "I believe I've got something better on tap than talking to you. You're a fireman, used to putting out fires. I wonder if you'll be able to do the trick if I pour coal oil on your chair and your clothes, and set the whole afire?"

He paused, laughed, then tip-toed off behind our hero, where the latter could not see him.

"Burning is the right thing for a fireman that gets too noseey," continued Jimmy Hunt, with a chuckle.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GRIT OF A LITTLE FELLOW.

Jimmy Hunt's smile was so wicked that Wide's face went white with dread.

His tormentor chuckled gleefully.

Wide knew that such a fire under him, if kindled at once, could inflict tormenting and fatal burns ere Terry could be looked for to arrive with the police.

"Scares you, does it?" laughed Jimmy. "Too bad—for I haven't got the oil here. Wish I had. I——"

Jimmy Hunt's explanation was cut short with an oath, uttered by himself.

In his eagerness to torment our hero Hunt had forgotten the children for the moment.

Now, a draft of air on his legs made Hunt wheel about.

The door was open; only Ethel, of the children, remained.

Jimmy leaped toward the door and darted outside.

Some distance off, up the field, the fellow caught sight of his young son, going as fast as eight-year-old legs could streak it.

"Here, you young imp!" yelled the fond father, adding a couple of oaths.

Tommy tried to run faster, without looking back.

"Stop, you little imp! Stand still!"

Tommy's only reply was a yell of defiance as he raced on.

His father kept after him, and would speedily have won the race, but the use of liquor for years had taken much of the speed out of Jimmy Hunt's legs.

"You stop right where you are, or I'll half-kill you when I get you!" panted the angry man.

Tommy's only reply was in the form of startled yells.

Two or three windows went up in the neighborhood as Tommy left the field to keep on up a street.

Jimmy Hunt, who was now panting a good deal, began to feel that he could neither stop his son nor overtake him.

Just as Tommy reached the next corner he ran into four men coming around the corner.

They were laborers, on their way to new work.

One of them caught Tommy up, laughingly.

"Where so fast, little man? And what makes ye yell so?"

For Master Tommy had redoubled his yells.

"Put me down! I want to get away!" he screamed.

"Thank you, men," called Jimmy, hurrying up. "That's my boy. He thinks he's in for a whipping, and is trying to get away from me."

"So that's your pop, eh?" asked the one who had picked up the little boy.

"Yes," replied Master Tommy, quickly. "But don't let him come near me. He'll kill me! He's a bad man, and the police want to get him."

Jimmy Hunt changed color a bit, but he did not lose his impudence.

"Hand the boy to me," he ordered. "I'll take care of him."

"Don't! He'll kill me, I tell you!" screamed the boy. "He told me so!"

There was something so decidedly ugly, in fact, in Jimmy's eyes at this moment that another of the laborers felt called upon to interfere.

"There may be something in what the little lad says," he objected.

"Mates," he said, "the little fellow's fright ain't put on. Maybe we'd better look into this."

"Nonsense!" roared Jimmy Hunt, but he changed color again, a fact that the suspicious laborer was not slow to see.

"You wait a minute, mister," said the same objector. "I reckon we've got the right to question this little fellow a bit."

"I haven't got any time to fool with you men, or any one," stormed Hunt. "Hand the boy over!"

"Don't you let him take me," begged Master Tommy, in a voice shrill with new fright.

"If you're pressed for time, you can mosey right along," said the suspicious one. "But I vote that the kid doesn't go with you until this thing has been looked into."

Jimmy Hunt swore.

He had his revolver in his pocket, and could have used it, but he hesitated about trying it on four men at arm's length.

"See here, boy," spoke the first laborer who had objected, "don't ye be a bit afraid. Ye said your father was wanted by the police. What for?"

"He's a—a criminal," faltered Tommy. "Mamma said so."

"That boy is one of the worst little liars in the country," laughed Jimmy Hunt, harshly.

"Maybe he is," spoke the laborer. "But have ye any objection to going to the police station to see what the cops think about it?"

Jimmy was nervous, now.

He began to feel that matters were getting worse, and that he might yet find himself being hauled through the streets.

"Oh, if you men are fools enough to pay heed to all the prattle of a small child——" he sneered.

"I notice that this prattle, as ye call it, seems to bother ye a good deal," remarked the suspicious one. "Mates, I think we'll be justified in doing just what I'm going to propose. I say that we take this scared little fellow to the police station, and then, if this man is telling the truth, he won't be afraid to go to the station house to prove his property, so to speak."

For Master Tommy, having somehow gotten the idea that these men intended to surrender him to his unnatural parent, after all, had begun to scream with greater terror than before, while his little face was ghastly with terror.

"Give me the boy!" growled Jimmy.

"You move on," commanded the suspicious one, putting the flat of a big hand against Jimmy's face and pushing him backward.

It looked so much like fight that Jimmy, backing away, turned to leave them.

Yet the very fact of his doing so made these men more suspicious than ever.

"Where ye going, now, stranger?" the suspicious one called after him.

"You carry me, and come with me," offered Master Tommy, with sudden eagerness, "and I'll show you. My little sister is there, too, and a young man that he says he's going to burn up."

"Hold your tongue, you little talking machine!" ordered Hunt, angrily.

"Take me, and I'll show you men where the place is," proposed Master Tommy.

The other laborers agreeing to this, they stepped forward, carrying the little fellow, for Tommy's further information had roused their curiosity to fever heat.

This last information proved the last straw for Hunt.

White and dangerous, he turned, sprinting back to the field.

The laborers now followed in good earnest.

Seeing them come, Jimmy Hunt, as he turned into the field, halted, whirling about as he whipped out his revolver.

"Get back, you fools, if you know when you're well off!" he hissed, aiming at the one who had first suspected him.

That stopped them quickly enough, for none of them cared to be changed into a sieve.

While three of the quartette stood their ground, however, the one who carried Master Tommy darted into a doorway that the little fellow might not be hit.

Hunt hesitated for a moment, as to whether to go back, and, at the point of the pistol, demand the surrender of Master Tommy.

While these men had halted, they did not look as though such a move would be wholly safe.

So, cursing his luck, Hunt kept on toward the shanty.

Wide, left to himself, had begun to test the cords, with the result that he had all but freed himself when his enemy burst into the shanty, revolver in hand.

Ethel screamed.

Wide, who had just been on the point of trying to raise himself out of the chair, sank back, holding his hands close behind him.

"I've a good mind to shoot you full of holes, Halstead," snarled Jimmy Hunt, halting before his prisoner and handling the revolver in a careless way that got on the young fireman's nerves.

Wide looked into the fellow's eyes as coolly as he could. Ethel, who had been crying softly, now began to scream with terror, for her father ran to her, snatching her up in his arms.

"I'd like to shoot you right down now, Halstead," went on Jimmy, as he made for the door. "But it might cost me too much."

Through the door ran Jimmy, scaring Ethel into silence as he dashed onward.

Wide, the instant that he was alone, sprang up again, trying to release his hands from what remained of the bonds about his wrists.

Hunt headed straight for the river.

It was at this moment that Terry Rourke hurried on the scene, accompanied by one policeman.

They caught sight of the laborers standing there, then of Jimmy rushing toward the river.

"Kape that boy wid yez till we get back," Terry shot behind him, as he and the policeman dashed forward.

Then Wide appeared in the doorway.

As soon as he caught sight of his chum and the policeman he waited for them to come up with him.

"Be careful how you get near Hunt," Wide called. "He has a revolver in one hand."

Looking backward and seeing himself pursued, Hunt, who was a good deal hampered by the weight of Ethel, finally put her down, then flew forward.

In a twinkling the policeman and the young firemen went by Miss Ethel, about whom they did not worry, now that she was out of her father's clutches.

"Get back there!" yelled Hunt, firing a shot under his left elbow, as he still ran, but half-turned.

The aim had not been careful, but the bullet, as luck would have it, landed in the fleshy part of the policeman's leg.

Wide halted, wheeled, going back.

"Badly hit?" he asked the cop.

"Guess it don't amount to much," was the calm answer.

The bone had not been drilled by the bullet, but the officer stepped stiffly, and was losing blood.

"Keep back, Irish!" yelled Hunt, turning again to aim at Rourke.

"The Irish can't kape back whin there's throuble!" yelled Terry, sprinting straight on after his man, after the first startled halt.

But Terry had his eye on the fellow's pistol hand, more than on his path.

A very ordinary stick lay in the way, and on it water had frozen.

As Rourke's foot hit it, down he went, wrenching one of his knee-caps just enough to half-cripple him for the moment.

Springing up again, Terry found himself almost hobbling, instead of running.

Hunt ran into the yard of a little mill.

Hearing the shooting, the laborers had come forward.

Now, while one of them helped the officer away, and the Hunt children followed them, the other three went with Wide and Terry to look for Jimmy Hunt.

That rascal, profiting by a short start over the pursuit, had now hidden himself securely somewhere.

He could not be found, even after half an hour of searching.

By this time the Hunt children had been taken to the station house, where they gave an account of how their father had gotten them into his clutches.

Jimmy Hunt, surprising them in the carpenter shop while Mr. Ellis was out in the back yard, had frightened them with awesome threats.

He had then told them that their mother had been hurt, was very ill, and that they must come quickly and silently if they wanted to see her alive.

Both had followed in awed silence, unable to believe wholly that their mother was dying. Jimmy had even allowed them to believe that their speedy arrival might help to save her life.

Once they had reached the shanty, from which Jimmy Hunt probably intended to remove them slyly at night, Tommy began to feel very certain that they had been tricked.

He was kept silent, however, by threats, until Wide's arrival.

Then the little fellow became very thoroughly convinced that his father was still the same old rascal.

Mrs. Hunt came to claim her little ones, and took them again to the home of the Ellises, where she, too, was invited to remain for the present.

Mr. Ellis immediately bought a savage-looking bulldog.

As for Hunt, the police now sent out an official notice that he was "wanted" for the crime of kidnapping and on suspicion of arson.

CHAPTER V.

TED BLAMES IT ON KITTY.

"How-do, Miss Elwell?" asked Ted, standing, hat in hand, before the door of the flat in which Flossie lived with her parents.

"Oh, Mr. Lester, I am delighted!" cried Flossie, beam-

And, indeed, she was, for Ted was one of the "Lesters of Belmont," and it looked good to little Miss Flossie to have him on her visiting list.

"Is Skip here?" asked Ted, who knew very well that Skip was not.

"No," said Flossie, disappointedly, "for, in her mind's eye, she saw Master Ted now beating a rapid retreat.

"Too bad," sighed Ted. "I thought he might be. I've been looking for him all about town. I wanted to see him especially."

"Why, he may drop in here at any moment," hinted Flossie, eagerly. "Come in, won't you, please?"

"Well, for a few moments, then, thank you," nodded Ted.

He followed Flossie into the parlor, where there was already one other guest of distinction, Marjorie Kent, from over Waverly way.

"You've met Miss Kent, haven't you?" asked Flossie, quickly.

"Oh, yes; several times," admitted Ted, bowing in Marjorie's direction.

Marjorie had arisen, extending her hand.

Ted shook her hand, after which both seated themselves, while little Miss Elwell, who was highly delighted at having

two "real society young people" in her parlor at the same time, rattled on with talk.

"Flossie, just a minute, please!" called her mother from somewhere at the back of the flat.

"Excuse me," said little Miss Elwell, and hurried from the room.

The instant that the door was closed, Ted rose, hastened over to Marjorie, took her hand in earnest this time, kissed her and behaved in general in a way that would have made Flossie's eyes stick out had she been peeping through the keyhole.

For Ted had known that Marjorie would be here to-day, and had called on purpose to see her.

It was a sly little way that these secret sweethearts had of keeping their young heart affair to themselves.

"You're going to come to the leap-year dance to-morrow night, aren't you?" Marjorie whispered, anxiously.

"I ought to, sure," agreed Ted. "Oh, yes, I guess I'll be able to fix it somehow, but I've got to think it out."

"Anyway, you'll be sure to fix it, and go, won't you?" pressed Marjorie.

"I sure will, somehow."

"You haven't made your plan yet, then?"

"No; I've got it all to think out," replied Ted. "Hang it! I wish I could really talk to you somewhere, Marje. Floss'll be in here 'most any second."

"Then, see here," whispered Marjorie, while Ted squeezed her hand fondly, "you find an excuse for leaving here pretty soon. I'll go soon after. Then we can meet, just as if by accident, at the corner of Ellis and Stuyvesant streets. Will that do?"

"Sure!" agreed Ted, solemnly.

He bent over, kissing her, and just at that instant an icy chill shot down his spine, for he heard the door-knob turning.

Flossie was coming back, but, quicker than a wink, Ted switched Marjorie's handkerchief from her hand, then picked it up from the floor.

"Thank you, Mr. Lester," said Marjorie, sweetly.

Flossie looked interested, but she hadn't been in time really to see what would have interested her a lot more.

"Why, aren't there any chairs?" asked Flossie. "You're both standing up."

"I was about to go," explained Ted, who was rapidly getting the whole gait at polite fibbing. "I had just asked Miss Kent to say good-by to you for me."

"Why must you go?" asked Flossie, disappointedly.

"Oh, I've got a lot to do this afternoon," Ted assured her. "Sorry, for I'd like to stay longer. Good-afternoon."

As Ted went nimbly down the stairs he muttered to himself:

"I believe I'll really know how to tell a lie after a little more."

Ted walked briskly near the scene of his appointment with his sweetheart, then killed time until he saw Marjorie down the street.

"There's nobody out around here that we know," murmured Ted. "Now, let's have a walk and a good chat together, Marje."

That being wholly agreeable to the young lady, they strolled slowly, enjoying themselves hugely for the next few minutes.

Then Joe Darrell and Dot Preston came around the corner, walking briskly, but both stopped when they caught sight of the younger sweethearts.

Dot smiled mischievously, at seeing Ted, the out-and-out-girl-hater, thus employed.

Joe felt a sudden start, and wanted to rub his eyes.

Ted's first quick wish was that a hole in the earth would open up and swallow him.

Yet he had been caught in a fix like this before, and experience was making him quick-witted.

"How-dy, Joe? Good-afternoon, Miss Preston," hailed Ted, lifting his hat to Joe's sweetheart. "I have just been given to understand how fortunate I am."

"You certainly appear to be," returned Dot, mischievously.

"Miss Kent has informed me that Kitty suggested me as a suitable young man for her to take to the dance to-morrow night. I didn't know that they'd let me into an affair like that."

As Ted spoke he managed to make a secret grimace to Joe, as though to show that he had been caught against his will.

Dot was speaking to Marjorie now, so Ted and Joe stepped to one side.

"What do you think of Kit, for letting me into a trick like that?" demanded Ted. "Doesn't it come pretty near being an outrage?"

"I think you're mighty lucky, without sense enough to know it," retorted Joe, severely.

"But I don't care about dancing," muttered Ted. "And girls——!"

He murmured that last word as though in huge disgust.

"That girl is a heap too fine to be wasted on a pagan girl-hater like you," said Joe, indignantly. "You ought to think yourself in luck."

"Sure, I do," retorted Ted, mockingly.

"Are you going much further?" Dot was asking little Miss Kent.

"No; I'm going through to the car and go downtown to join mamma," Marjorie replied.

"Quick, now, you little heathen!" coached Joe. "She's invited you for to-morrow night, so you must take her to the car. Speak up quickly Ted!"

"Does that go with it?" asked Ted, looking rueful.

"Of course, it does. Talk up quickly, now, and ask the little lady if you may put her aboard her car."

Ted turned, asking in his politest way, and Marjorie, of course, accepted his offer.

"Why, we might as well walk along with——" suggested Dot.

But Joe pulled her sleeve, choking off her plan.

"Why didn't you want to walk along with them?" asked Dot, as she and Darrell strolled away together.

"Because it'll do Ted good to be seen walking with a nice girl once in a while. What do you think, Dot? The little chump has a grouch on because Kitty Lester put Miss Kent up to asking him to the dance?"

"Oh, he'll grow more like other young fellows as he gets older," predicted Dot Preston.

"I doubt it," muttered Joe.

Ted, in the meantime, had winked at Marjorie as they stepped away together.

"You saw how I fixed it, Marje, for you to invite me to the dance to-morrow night. Was that all right?"

"All right," nodded little Miss Kent, smilingly. "Any old way is all right, for I had set my heart on going to-morrow night."

When Ted returned home, and found his pretty cousin alone, he said, half bashfully:

"Kit, I've got something for you to remember."

"What is it, Ted, dear?"

"I told Joe and Dot Preston that you put Marje up to inviting me to the dance to-morrow night. Remember that you did that for a tease on me."

"Oh, that's all right, Ted, dear," smiled Kitty, serenely. "I did do it. I won't forget."

CHAPTER VI.

CAPTAIN FRED'S LEAP YEAR GROUCH.

The floor of Eagle Hall gave boundingly under the tread of a hundred and fifty young couples.

This leap year dance was proving a big success.

The girls had started leap year right by giving this dance early, for they wanted to "square themselves" before the Firemen's Ball was given.

To-night they gave the invitations and bore the expense, even to the suppers.

The young ladies, too, invited their partners, instead of waiting for the young men to come to them.

Once this leap year ball was over, things would go on again in the usual way through the season, the young men giving the invitations and playing hosts, as at the big Firemen's Ball, soon due.

Ted was there, in fine feather, though he carefully concealed the fact.

He accepted invitations to dance with Flossie, and with two other girls to whom he knew Marjorie would not object.

Then other girls came forward, but to their invitations Ted replied that he did not expect to stay late, and looked just sufficiently bored.

That left nearly all of his numbers clear for little Miss Kent, and those that they did not care to dance they sat out.

Young Lester thus managed to keep his girl-hating reputation, and yet enjoy his little sweetheart's company to the utmost.

Skip was there with Flossie, and enjoying himself as much as ever he did in his life, for Skip, like many another tough boy, was a perfect dancer.

Skip's enjoyment was heightened by the fact that his enemy, Bud Messner, mascot for the Neptunes, was also there.

For Bud, though present, was not there as a guest.

He had come as a sort of personal attendant to Larry Downes and Bob Fullerton.

So Bud was not allowed upon the floor, but was obliged to keep at the side of the hall, looking wrathfully on at the way Flossie was enjoying herself with almost any youngster except himself.

Indeed, when Flossie went by Bud, she seemed rather carefully to look past him.

Skip, in his best suit, and a spruce-looking one it was, passed Bud at last.

"Aw, punk!" growled Messner. "Youse feels big, don't youse?"

"Speakin' t' me? Wot?" inquired Skip, loftily.

"Aw, punk!" growled Bud, "who'd youse s'pose I was talkin' ter? One uv de gentlemen?"

"All youse needs is ter know yer place," warned Skip, briskly. "Youse soivants ain't s'posed to get gay wid de guests at de ball."

Skip had passed on before Bud could find any reply to that lofty crusher.

"Say, wouldn't I like to have him chasin' me eround a corner, an' me hidin' dere wid a brick, ready to push his face in wid it?" cried Bud, savagely, to himself.

"P'chee, it was er mean t'ing to say t' de poor mutt, but he was lookin' for it, sure!" said Skip to himself.

More than half of the Washingtons were there, with their girls.

Not one of Wide's crew were in evening dress, but wore their best suits.

Captain Fred Parsons, however, as well as about a dozen other Neptunes, had made a point of coming prepared to show that they owned or could borrow full-dress suits.

Fred, with his good figure and good carriage, and his darkly handsome face, made a really striking appearance, though in Kitty Lester's eyes, as in those of many others, he lacked the fine manliness of appearance that was so noticeable in Young Wide Awake.

Wide was "busy" every number, though many of these he danced with Mistress Kitty.

Fred's own partner, a Miss Kate Gray, claimed six numbers on the programme.

The remaining numbers Parsons succeeded in keeping open, despite many leap year requests for dances.

"Kit'll be sure to ask me, and I must be sure to have a couple of numbers open that she isn't engaged 'for," the Neptune captain assured himself.

So, every time the music stopped, and partners took leave of each other, Captain Fred looked eagerly in Miss Lester's direction.

"It takes her a long time to discover that I'm here," Fred muttered, disappointedly, after the first half-dozen numbers had been danced and Kitty still failed to come his way.

Then Fred quietly tried to attract Faith Vane's attention his way, but Faith was too busy chatting with Terry to notice the Neptune commander.

"If Faith should ask me to dance with her, that might wake Kit up to the idea that I'm here and she knows me," sighed Captain Parsons.

The truth was that Kitty did not mean to slight Captain Fred.

Yet there were so many Washingtons present, and she wanted to dance with as many of them as possible, that, somehow, the disconsolate young Parsons slipped her mind until her card was full.

Then Kitty noticed her oversight with a start.

"Oh, dear! Fred Parsons will feel offended, I'm afraid," she sighed, to Wide. "But, really, I forgot him until my card was full."

"Explain it to him?" said Wide.

"I'm afraid an explanation of that kind would only make matters worse," Kitty rejoined. "Oh, dear!"

"Can't you manage to slip one of our fellows, then?" suggested Halstead.

"Dick! I wouldn't want to offend one of your own comrades. That would look dreadful."

"Then I'll give up one of my dances," proposed Wide, though he felt glum about it.

"You foolish boy! What do you think I came here for, if not to have all of my dances with you?" cried Kitty.

"Then I don't see any easy way out of the snarl, Kit."

"There isn't any way out."

"And Fred will have to go without a dance?"

"Unless one of your fellows forgets his engagement with me."

"I can't understand how any fellow could forget a promised delight like that," declared Young Wide Awake, promptly.

"You silly boy!"

"Poor Fred! I can understand how he feels!"

A peal of the cornet brought the partners together.

As the strains of a waltz floated out, and young people drifted away together, happy, smiling, chatting, Captain Fred withdrew to a spot behind a palm in a corner.

"This is Halstead's work," he muttered, angrily. "I didn't think he would be so mean with me, for we've been good enough friends for a long time. But it's his work, all right. He and Kit have just been having a long talk, and there they go away together, his arm around her. They're laughing and having a great time—probably thinking how they're letting me stand around and cool myself!"

The longer Fred looked from what really amounted to a hiding place, the more glum and wrathful he became.

"I might as well go home, for all the dance Kit will ask me to with her to-night," glowered the Neptune commander.

Kate Gray went by, on another young man's arm, her eyes searching Fred out even in this retired nook.

But as Fred cared not a straw about her, it hurt him none to see Kate on another's arm.

Had it not been for the certainty of making himself worse than ridiculous, Captain Fred would have stalked out of the hall at once.

He could not, however, leave the young lady who had invited him here.

So, except for the numbers pledged to his own partner, Fred moped about, declining the few invitations that he now received.

"Oh, this may strike you as a fine trick, Dick Halstead!" muttered Parsons, again and again. "What a fool I was to think that you'd really be a friend of mine. How can we be friends, when we both want the same girl? I'm a fool, I know, to give Kit Lester a second thought, but I can't help it."

Wide was going through the mazes of a polka, now, with Faith.

Soon after our hero danced with Amy Moulton.

Then back again he went to Kitty Lester, for the next number was to be theirs together.

Kitty's eyes were sparkling, her cheeks prettily flushed with pleasure.

Yet in that warmed hall she was feeling the effects of dancing every number.

"Dick, dear," she murmured, "won't you sit through our

next number, like a good, dear fellow? I believe my head will be dizzy, if I don't soon get some rest."

"Why, certainly," nodded Wide, as they went to seats at the side.

When the music struck up again Captain Fred saw these sweethearts seated and looking on.

"One number that Kit didn't have engaged," fumed the Neptune captain. "So she sits it out sooner than look my way. Or, is this her work or Halstead's? Confound it, I wish I knew! This kind of treatment is enough to make a fellow ache!"

There was a little more dancing, then came the supper.

To this, of course, each young man went in with the young lady who had invited him to the leap year dance.

As Wide and Kitty seated themselves, they saw Parsons and Miss Gray in the chairs opposite.

Fred looked up with a quick frown, which, however, Halstead and Kitty lost through turning to speak with each other.

"They're rubbing it in by showing how absorbed they are in each other," was Fred's swift, jealous thought.

"Good-evening, captain," was Wide's friendly greeting, after he had seated himself, for he felt that he must be especially nice in view of what he realized was the other's disappointment.

But Parsons, speaking to Miss Gray, pretended not to hear.

Wide didn't understand quickly, but Kitty, with her quicker woman's wit, took in the situation at once, and understood the cause of it all.

After they had started in eating Wide happened to look up to find the Neptune commander looking at him.

"A very pleasant time, this," nodded Wide, with a pleasant smile.

"Oh, so-so," grumbled Fred, ungraciously.

Miss Gray flushed a little at that rudeness.

But Fred smiled into her eyes, then found chance to whisper.

"I don't want that fellow to get too friendly."

Which surprised Kate Gray a good deal more, for she admired Young Wide Awake, and had supposed that he and Fred were on good terms.

Our hero was now aware that Parsons was grumpy about something, and rightly guessed what that something was.

Kitty, in her desire to smooth over matters, made them a little worse by smiling at Parsons and inquiring:

"You don't care much about dancing, do you, Captain Parsons?"

To Fred that was like pouring oil on a fire.

"This affair is a little too mixed," he said, curtly.

That caused Kitty to stiffen up.

After that she did not attempt to talk to him.

She devoted her attention to Wide, and to three or four of the Washingtons whose seats were near by.

There were but few dances after supper, as it was planned to have the affair close before one o'clock.

The last two dances Wide and Kitty enjoyed together.

As the orchestra started the strains of "Home, Sweet Home," Wide went after Kitty's wraps and his own coat and hat.

There was already a crowd before the coat-room window, so Wide stepped back to wait a little while.

"Halstead, I want to speak to you," sounded Parsons' harsh voice in his ear.

The unfriendly tone was not at all lost on our hero, but he replied good-naturedly:

"Certainly," and followed the Neptune commander aside.

"Halstead, do you think you played a decent trick on me to-night?" demanded Parsons.

"Why, what on earth do you mean, Fred?"

"You know, well enough."

"I guess you'd better explain."

Wide spoke coldly, now, for he saw that good nature was going to be wasted in the other's present frame of mind.

"You deliberately kept Miss Lester from asking me to dance with her."

"I certainly did nothing of the sort," Wide declared, promptly.

"I say you did!"

"Then you're stating what isn't the truth, Parsons."

"You'll be telling me next that I lie."

"You can frame the words to suit yourself. You just made a charge, and I have given you my word that it wasn't true."

"That amounts to calling me a liar!"

Wide looked his rival straight in the eyes.

"Parsons, are you trying to thrust a quarrel on me?" he asked, coolly.

"You've acted meanly to-night, and then called me a liar!" cried Fred, passionately.

"I have already told you you were mistaken."

"Confound you, I'll show you!" cried Parsons, wrathily.

He started forward, clenching his fist and raising it.

From a little distance Larry Downes and Big George Anderson saw this, though they did not know what had led up to it.

Anyway, they were quick about it.

Wide stood his ground, but just before Fred had a chance to hit him, the two other Neptunes leaped in, thrusting Captain Fred back.

"Not here, Fred!" warned Larry, vigorously. "Don't disgrace yourself!"

Big George looked grimly on, ready to stop a fight here at all odds, and Fred read the determination in his eyes.

He stood back, therefore, his face white, his breath coming fast.

Wide, seeing that it was all off for the present, bowed slightly to Larry, then stepped back to the crowd around the coat-room window.

With the wraps Young Wide Awake joined his sweetheart. Terry Rourke was already on hand, assisting Faith with her wraps.

"Has anything happened?" asked Mistress Kitty, suddenly.

"Why?"

"There's an unusual look in your eyes."

"It must be the one-o'clock-in-the-morning look," laughed Wide.

As they were leaving the hall Captain Fred and Kate Gray passed near them.

Captain Fred slyly clenched a fist, managing to shake it in Wide's direction.

It was an open declaration of war.

But Kitty Lester didn't see it.

CHAPTER VII.

WORKING OUT A GRUDGE AT A FIRE.

In the two days that passed next Captain Fred and Wide met twice, but there was no attempt to renew the quarrel started at the dance.

Wide didn't see any need of carrying the dispute further.

If Parsons was still "sore," then he evidently felt that the time hadn't come for settling the matter.

That Parsons did harbor the matter was shown by the way in which he avoided Dick Halstead's eye.

Only Terry, of the Washingtons, knew just what had happened.

The other fellows of Wide's crew were curious, but all to no purpose.

In the meantime Belmont had other news to think about.

The reason for Jimmy Hunt's determined efforts to get his children into his own care had leaked out.

Mrs. Hunt's father had died, leaving her twenty thousand dollars, and a like amount to be divided between her two children, Mrs. Hunt to have charge of the entire little fortune.

Jimmy Hunt had been the first to hear of it.

As Mrs. Hunt had rather drifted out of her father's life after her miserable marriage, the lawyers did not know, at once, where to look for the now fortunate woman.

Hunt, hearing the news, and realizing that he had no legal way of getting at any of the money, had evidently planned to get the children in his power, as a means of forcing payments from the wife he had once deserted.

How he itched to get control of at least a few thousand can be guessed only by one who understands an idle and drunken fellow's longings for unearned money.

The morning that the lawyers found Mrs. Hunt, through the published police notice asking for her husband's arrest, they turned over to that astonished woman a good-sized first payment on her fortune.

She was now able to pay her way with the Ellises.

Mrs. Hunt also engaged a young, husky special police officer to make it his especial business, for the present, to guard her children from any harm.

Jimmy Hunt had not been seen again, yet he was not far away.

His reddish mustache he had shaved off.

His bushy hair was trimmed much closer, and then Hunt had treated it with peroxide of hydrogen, changing it to a light yellow.

These changes, with a pair of steel-bowed spectacles added, and a change of clothing, so altered the fellow's appearance that he had the impudence to go about in Belmont, watching for his chance, for he itched as much as ever to get his fingers around some of his wife's inherited money.

Wide passed Hunt three or four times without suspecting who it was that he looked at.

That he would yet find a way to wrest from his wife a part of the money that he felt should be his, Hunt did not doubt.

Lately the fellow had "cleaned up" a fair amount of money at the racetrack, and this he now had the judgment to handle carefully, taking pains, also, not to drink enough to affect his mind seriously.

After the great hope of extorting money from his wife, Hunt's next greatest plan, in case he failed, was to revenge himself on the young fire captain who had interfered with him so seriously.

Joe Darrell, who knew no more of this than did any one else, had passed Hunt a few times without recognizing him, although Joe had seen the fellow at the time when Wide had yelled to Officer Oswald from the burning roof to arrest the fellow.

Joe was concerning himself principally with the evident coldness between our hero and Parsons, and wondering intensely what it was all about.

At last, Darrell let his curiosity go so far that, meeting Wide on Main street, he taxed our hero with it.

"What's the row between you and Parsons?" Darrell asked.

"You'll have to ask him, I guess," laughed Halstead.

"But there seems to be some row," persisted Joe.

"Ask Fred if there is."

"Wide, what I'm wondering is, whether this new state of affairs is going to start the old scrappy troubles between the two companies all over again."

"I hope not," was Wide's quiet answer.

"And I was hoping just the other way," Joe went on, stoutly. "Wide, there are two or three fellows among the Neptunes that ought to be punched good and plenty, and I'm wondering if the time has come."

"The time hasn't come, Joe."

"Then there's no real bad blood between you and Parsons?"

"There is none on my side, Joe."

"That's one kind of an answer," retorted Joe, in a dissatisfied tone. "Well, all I've got to ask is that you'll give me the first tip when the new friendship between the companies is all off."

Wide broke out laughing.

"Oh, Joe, Joe! To hear you, one would think that you couldn't live without fighting."

"Oh, I don't want to fight," responded Joe, with mock indignation. "All I want is to tell two or three Neptunes my opinion of them—and then let events take their course!"

"What you need," said Wide, severely, "is work. This long holiday vacation is too much for you. You're breaking down under the strain of long idleness. Why, if it's nothing else but some good, hustling work at a fire——"

"Don't!" warned Joe, who was superstitious about joking on the subject of fire alarms.

"You're too superstitious," laughed Wide.

"I can't help it," Joe declared. "Every time some fellow gets gay with the subject of fire alarms——"

Clang! clang!

"There!" growled Joe, looking queerly at his captain. "You've done it! I knew you would!"

Then both turned, running rapidly toward the engine house.

Washington was out and away in good season.

The box was just south of Main street a couple of blocks.

It was not a long run, but it was a hard one, for the wind was blowing hard in their faces the greater part of the run.

Neptune was on the spot about thirty seconds earlier, a fact that seemed to give Captain Fred a good deal of satisfaction.

The fire was on the nearly flat roof of a two-story extension at the rear of a three-story building.

A new fire, of wood, had been kindled in a stove below, and the sparks from the chimney had fallen on the shingles.

A brisk fire was in progress by the time that the blaze was discovered.

By the time the engines arrived the fire was furious, and was threatening the main building.

"Best hydrant is ours!" shouted Parsons, exultingly. "Couple on lively, there! Run the hose to the rear as fast as you can!"

Hook and Ladder No. 1 having made a good run, Captain Tom Scott's crew were ready with a ladder as soon as the Neptunes had rushed their hose-line into the back yard.

"Couple on, Hal, and wait orders," directed Wide, as he saw Pelton turn a corner and come driving down the street at a gallop.

As Washington was obliged to take a hydrant much further down the street a good deal of hose had to be unreeled.

Chief Pelton was up and out of his buggy by the time that Hal was making the couple.

Just a look from the side yard did Pelton take, before he shouted:

"Captain Halstead, go up a ladder on to the main roof and report down to me whether you can use your stream best from up there."

Wide signalled for a ladder, which the hook and ladder men ran up.

Just as Wide was ascending, Captain Fred, having seen his own stream at work, ran up.

Espying Wide going up the ladder, Parsons mounted quickly after him.

"Hullo! You coming up, too?" hailed Wide, as he stepped to the roof of the main building.

"Huh! Got as much right up here as you have, haven't I?" sneered the Neptune leader.

Wide didn't answer, but quickly crossed the roof to the rear.

As he stood looking down he saw to what good advantage the Washington hose could be used here.

Nearly all of the roof of the extension was ablaze, the flames mounting high.

Close to where the extension joined the main building was a space of shingled roof, seven or eight feet wide, where the fire had not yet reached.

Yet, with the wind the way it had changed, it was a question, probably, of only a minute or two when the fire would cross this flame-free strip and the main building would be ablaze.

At the further edge of the lower roof were the Neptune nozzlemen, Big George and Brick Houston, their faces almost roasting as they faced the red glare.

Yet they stuck to their post, pouring the big stream on, though, as yet, with hardly any effect in downing the flames.

Wide wheeled away, to start across the roof and make his report to the fire chief.

As he turned, Halstead accidentally jostled Captain Fred.

"Look out where you're going, can't you?" growled Parsons.

At the same time he gave Wide a push that was meant to be more ugly than hard.

Young Wide Awake's foot slipping at that instant, the push was enough to send him slipping over the roof edge.

For an instant Captain Fred stood paralyzed.

It was too late now to save the young Washington commander.

With a cry of alarm Young Wide Awake slipped over the roof, clutched frantically at the edge, then dropped to the blazing roof below.

With a yell of fright Parsons sprang forward, peering downward.

Wide had struck on his hands, but his head touched the wall of the main building and he fell over, stunned.

Startled Parsons saw that the edge of the fire was almost at Halstead's boot-heels.

In a twinkling more the stunned young captain's clothes must be afire from the advancing flames.

"Anderson and Houston saw me push him!" chattered frightened Fred, as a shout of horror went up from the two Neptune nozzlemen.

CHAPTER VIII.

CAPTAIN FRED IS SICK WITH TERROR.

"He'll be burned to death down there, and they'll say I did it!" faltered Parsons, as he gazed at the helpless body of his rival.

"Jump down and get him!" roared Big George's voice.

Parsons hesitated.

It seemed exactly like leaping into a blazing furnace.

"Aw, don't be a cold-foot!" shouted Brick's taunting bellow.

"They'll stand me up for murder, if I don't do something!" trembled the Neptune commander.

Then, sick with terror, desperate with the dread of what might be done to him, Parsons stooped, clutched at the roof edge and let himself drop.

His first move was to drag Wide around out of instant danger, laying his body close to the wall of the main building.

Big George, in the meantime, had shouted down an order for the Washingtons to take to the roof above with a short ladder that could be lowered.

The added news that their young captain was in danger nerved the Washingtons to their quickest work.

Anderson and Houston played the stream across the roof, doing their best to protect the two young captains from the onrush of the flames.

His heart beating dully with sickened horror, Parsons raised Wide to his feet, bracing him desperately against the wall.

Every time that Fred took a frightened look over his shoulder it seemed to him that the flames were about to leap forward, seizing both in its red embrace.

The heat already played against their backs.

Big George now gave a switch of the nozzle that played the stream upon both, in order to keep them from burning as long as possible.

"Bedad! Kape yure grit down there!" roared the voice of gallant Terry Rourke above.

Scr-r-rape! The short ladder was coming over the side.

It was placed in a twinkling.

Down the rungs came Terry, as fast as he could.

But Captain Fred, in desperation, had already lifted his rival, and was part way up the ladder.

"Good for ye, Par-r-rsons!" glowed Terry, as he gave a hand in lifting his imperilled chum up the ladder.

Fred gave a sickly smile as he realized how Rourke would change his tune when he realized that it was all the fault of the Neptune commander's dangerous temper.

"Wide's all r-r-right, boys!" called up Terry, as they bore the rescued one aloft.

As if to back up the claim, Wide opened his eyes, though he was still too dazed to realize just what had happened.

"I'm lucky if they don't throw me down to the ground," muttered Captain Fred, when he saw the faces of Wide's own comrades around him. "I'll slip down to the ground before Wide has time to do any talking."

He put this plan into operation, going down just before the Washington nozzle was started for that higher roof.

Hal, being on hand in command, ran the nozzle to the roof edge, now aiding Neptune's efforts below, while Terry, Phil and others did what they could for Wide.

"Ye slipped and fell, didn't yez?" Terry insisted.

Wide tried to think, then remembered, yet before he could answer, Rourke broke in with:

"'Tis a gallant lad thot Par-r-rsons is, sometimes. 'Twas himself jumped down and saved yez from the fire. We got the two av yez up just in toime."

So Wide, who had remembered, and might have denounced what he considered Fred's treachery, was silent.

"Are yez all r-right, now?" was Terry's next question.

"Yes, sure."

"Thin down to the ground wid yez. Ye're not needed up here, and yure head will be steadier down below."

Rourke insisting, and giving the aid of his own arm, Wide consented to go below.

Our hero was rather surprised at finding how weak he was on the ladder.

Though he was perfectly at home there, and unafraid, he was so weak that he would have fallen had it not been for Rourke.

Fred had slunk off, near the bottom of the Neptune ladder, for he wanted to be the first to have a sly word with Big George and Brick, and try to make sure that their account of the trouble would be easy on him.

"Good work, cap!" called down Big George, approvingly, when he caught sight of Parsons.

"Youse are all right, when youse gets started," added Brick.

"I wonder if they didn't really see me give that push?" flashed through Captain Fred's mind.

Chief Pelton was now questioning Rourke.

Always generous to friend or foe, where a brave deed was concerned, Terry gave a glowing account of Captain Fred's grit in saving the Washington captain.

Wide heard, but was silent.

Since no real harm had been done, he determined to wait until he could talk to Fred himself, before he decided to change the present account of the affair.

"Captain Parsons," said Chief Pelton, going over and resting a hand on that young man's shoulder, "you did a brave deed. I want to commend you for it."

That struck the Neptune boy dumb for the moment.

Before he could speak, Pelton had turned and walked away, giving his attention to the progress of the fire fighting.

"Confound it, I hope Halstead doesn't remember too much," thought Fred. "If he doesn't, then I'll come out of this with flying colors, instead of disgrace."

He waited nervously, occasionally watching our hero out of the corner of his eye.

Under the two streams the fire was kept from the main building, and, after a stubborn fight, the blaze on the extension roof was gradually gotten under control.

When he understood that the worst of the fight was over, Wide, though he was yet none too steady on his feet, came slowly over to where Captain Fred stood.

"I guess it's coming now," said Parsons to himself, as he stiffened for the ordeal.

"Parsons," began our hero, "I understand that you jumped down to the lower roof and rescued me."

"Well?" demanded Captain Fred.

"I want to ask you whether I'm correct in a notion I have, that you deliberately pushed me over the roof first of all?"

His eyes were searchingly on the Neptune boy, compelling the truth.

"I pushed you, Halstead," came the candid reply. "But I meant only to keep you from bumping into me. I had no notion you would slip over the roof's edge as you did."

"That's honest, isn't it, Fred?"

"Yes, it is."

"Then I want to thank you for jumping over to my relief."

Young Wide Awake held out his hand. After a moment of hesitation, Captain Fred took it.

"So that's how it happened?" asked a quiet voice behind them.

It was Fire Chief Pelton, who had approached them without being seen by either.

"That's the way, chief," replied Fred, after a start. "So, instead of doing anything great, you see I just jumped to make good for my own blunder."

"That doesn't lessen the excellence of your conduct any, Captain Parsons," replied the fire chief, promptly. "You did a gritty thing, captain. And you, Captain Halstead, do right to tell him so. I congratulate both of you young men."

Again Pelton stepped away.

Captain Fred, after fidgeting for a few seconds, broke out with:

"Halstead, I was a fool to get such a grouch on the night of the dance."

"Say no more about it," begged young Halstead.

"You'll forget it, then?"

"I have already, Fred."

From a little distance Wide's greatest enemy among the Neptunes was looking slyly on.

Gerald Keating saw the talk, and guessed what it meant, especially when he saw the two fire captains shaking hands.

Keating watched Fred with an ironical stare that disconcerted the Neptune commander as soon as he became conscious of it.

As soon as the Neptunes had put up their machines at

their fire station Gerald found a chance to slip a poisoned word into Parsons' ear.

"So we're going to go right on being the tail to the Halstead kite, are we?" he mocked.

"What do you mean?" asked Fred, flaring up.

"Oh, you're just going to be a toady to Dick Halstead, as before?" taunted Keating. "Halstead likes to have toadies, of course, for they make him seem bigger. But I can't say that you look very well in such a part. Do you find any fun in being the tail to another fellow's kite?"

Parsons, in truth, was beginning to recover from the effects of his scare, and with this came a humiliating feeling that he made friends too easily with the Washington captain, instead of waiting for our hero to make the first advances.

"Now, see here, Keating," retorted Fred, scowling, "don't you imagine, for a minute, that I don't know how to keep up my dignity."

"Why, I suppose you do," admitted Gerald. "But most folks, you know, judge by just what they see. Now, people of that kind would think you were so anxious to keep on Halstead's right side that you'd hang around that conceited fellow and say 'cuckoo' every time he speaks."

"Get out!" growled Fred.

"Well, I'll be hanged if that isn't what it looks like. I often wonder, Fred, what has become of your old-time nerve. You used to be a leader, those days."

"I'm still captain of Neptune No. 2, I believe," said Fred, stiffly.

"Yes, officially. But, Fred, doesn't it strike you that, in reality, you're more like a sort of second lieutenant on Washington No. 1? I'm not the only fellow in this company who is beginning to notice and wonder a good deal. Now, it's not bragging, for it's the truth, that we fellows, by rights, are the select fire company of Belmont. Nearly all of our fellows are out of the best families. We ought to lead in the fire department, and we will, if you and Larry head us right. But just now, if any one should send a letter addressed to the captain of the leading fire company, the postmaster would stick the letter in Halstead's mail box without thinking twice."

"Oh, I don't know," said Fred, sullenly.

"Well, I do, and so do other folks. You're about the only blind man around here, Fred Parsons. And we were climbing right up to the top of the fire department, when you had to go and tag on behind Dick Halstead. You're playing Halstead's game for him, Fred, and making yourself look like a booby, too. The worst of it is that it hits the company harder than it does you."

Fred began to look serious, for, somehow, the line of talk fitted in with his own dissatisfied thoughts.

Then the artful Keating went on:

"In your private affairs, of course, we don't so much mind what you do. For instance, you had the prettiest girl in Belmont. Halstead came along and took a liking to her. You just stepped to one side and let him have her, and now, at a dance, you have to stand around hungry for a chance to speak to her, and Halstead has her give you the go-by. And——"

"Stop that!" ordered Captain Fred, harshly, for it hurt.

"Yes, you're right. I didn't mean to poke into your private affairs, which are none of my business," Gerald

agreed, artfully. "It was all through my anxiety to show you how you're letting the same methods spoil the standing of our fire company. But I'll keep away from tender private affairs, and keep to what concerns the company alone."

With talk like this it was not difficult for Keating to fan Parsons' smoldering sulk into a flame of resentment against his generous rival.

Keating took pains to be with his captain the next forenoon, though the artful one did not again say anything about the subject of the yesterday's talk.

When Fred went downtown Keating went with him.

Down by the post-office they came upon Wide, standing with whom were Terry, Hal and Joe.

"Good-morning, Fred," was Wide's hail.

Neptune's commander met the smile with a scowl, as he drew himself up stiffly and retorted:

"Good-morning, Halstead."

He put so much emphasis on the "Halstead" that Wide felt staggered.

Keating chuckled inwardly, for he saw how well he had changed the wind.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MAN WHO CHANGED HIS FACE.

Having some time to spare in the evening, Wide decided to take a run down to Jim Cranston's house.

Jim, who was under the weather, had not been around at the fire station in three days, and Halstead wanted to see how his comrade was coming along.

As Terry was not at the fire station, our hero decided on going alone.

On his way to Cranston's Wide had to pass the Ellis house, where Mrs. Hunt and her children had found refuge.

"I hope that rascal has got out of town for good," muttered Wide.

Lighting a cigarette at the corner below was a well-built man, with smooth face, very blonde hair and with spectacles over his eyes.

It was Jimmy Hunt, but he had "changed his face" to such an extent by the changes that it was no wonder Wide did not recognize him.

Even the shaving off of a mustache, alone, often makes a great change in a face.

"Some young man waiting for his girl, I suppose," thought Wide. "Success to him. May she come along, soon."

Had Wide had any idea who the fellow was, and for what girl he was waiting, his thoughts and acts would have been much different.

But our hero kept unsuspectingly on to Jim's house.

Cranston he found with a bad cold, but sitting up and hoping to be out in two or three days more.

In the meantime, Jimmy Hunt had "met his girl."

He had already found out, by watching, that Mrs. Hunt slipped out in the evening to make purchases.

Hunt was on the corner, now, as his wife came along.

So altered was his appearance that, as Mrs. Hunt passed, she glanced at him, then away again, for she had never seen him with smooth face.

A low chuckle made the poor woman start, turn and look back.

Jimmy Hunt stepped after her, mockingly raising his hat.

"I've changed my face so that you don't know me, do you, Jennie?" he leered.

At sound of that hateful voice all the frightened woman's doubts fled.

"Jimmy!" she cried, in a voice between a gasp and a sob.

"Sh! Not so loud," he commanded, in a voice of suppressed harshness. "Thanks to you and that infernal young fireman, the police are looking for me hard. I won't let them take me alive. And I'll take you with me, if I'm obliged to finish myself to-night."

Out from under the fold of his overcoat he drew a revolver far enough for her to have a look at it.

The poor woman's face went ghastly white.

"Jimmy," she said, tremulously, "there was a time when I wouldn't so much have minded if you had put me out of my misery."

"But now that you've got a fortune to handle for the kids, times have changed—eh?" he jeered. "Jennie, it seems to have slipped your mind that I'm in for a part of that money!"

"How much do you expect to get?" she demanded, in a voice that she tried to make brave.

"Ten thousand dollars—half of the sum that came to you."

"You see," he went on, huskily, "I'm only out for my rights. That's half of the money that came to you. I ain't asking for any of the money that was left to our kids."

"Good reason why," retorted the woman. "You know that that money is in trust, and that even I can't handle it."

"Never mind that part of it, Jennie. I want my half of yours—ten thousand dollars."

"Do you think I carry it with me?" she demanded.

"No; I know better than that. But, see here, Jennie, you can and you must get me that ten thousand dollars. When you do, I'll clear out, if you want me to, and you need never see me again. I'll let you go, now, if you swear you'll get me the money fair and square. But, if you play any tricks on me, I'll wind up your life mighty quick! And I may decide to wind up the kids, too."

Wretch as he was, Hunt was probably bluffing about the children, at least, but he knew how to work on the terror-stricken heart of this poor woman.

"Jimmy, you can't be such a beast!" she faltered.

The frightened woman looked about her, in the hope that she would see the familiar brass buttons of the protecting policeman.

If only she could once get this man securely under arrest!

His crimes would be enough to hold him safely where he could not annoy her in the next years to come.

"Looking for help, Jennie?" muttered the wretched husband. "It wouldn't do you any good if it showed up. One yell from you, one move of anybody towards me, and I'd finish you first. So, if any one goes by, you take pains to talk natural to me and to laugh a bit until whoever comes by."

"You're pretty sure I won't dare to make any trouble for you, aren't you?" asked the woman, bitterly.

"Of course. I always did hold the trump cards, you know, Jennie."

"With me, you mean."

"With everybody, when I've tried it. But we're getting away from the subject. What do you mean to do?"

"What do you mean?"

"You know, well enough. Are you going to pledge me your word to get the ten thousand dollars and hand it over to me?"

"I—I can't get it all at once, Jimmy."

"You'll have to get it in two big lumps, then. I ain't going to wait and hang around on your pleasure."

"I—I'll do the best I can, Jimmy."

"You'll pledge me your word to raise the money, then?"

"I—I'll do my best—as I can see my way clear."

Jimmy Hunt swore an ugly oath.

He wanted to force this woman to pledge her word. For one thing, he knew her to be painfully exact about keeping any promises she made.

Even a promise made under threats she would be much inclined to keep.

"I want your promise," he insisted.

"It'll—it'll take a few days to raise the money," she pleaded, to gain time.

"Never mind. You must have some money about you now."

"Ye-es."

"Give it to me."

Mrs. Hunt did not seem to think of resisting; she was too afraid of this brute of a man.

Out came her purse, containing some fifty dollars.

She passed it over without seeming to dream of refusing.

Hunt thrust the purse into his pocket, then went on, fiercely:

"Now, your promise about the ten thousand!"

At that moment a clear whistle sounded on the air.

Someone, blowing out merrily the latest popular air, was coming down the next street to the corner.

"Someone's coming," whispered Mrs. Hunt, nervously.

"Then remember what I told you about keeping up appearances until he gets by," ordered Jimmy.

Now the whistler turned the corner, coming face to face with them.

It was Young Wide Awake.

"Oh, good-evening, Mrs. Hunt," was Wide's greeting, as he raised his cap.

"G-g-g-good-evening," she faltered, nervously.

Something in the pallor of her face, as well as her evident nervousness, struck the young fire captain.

Wide gave a swift look into the eyes of the very blonde man.

Hatred and rage were in Jimmy Hunt's look. He could not conceal them.

All in an instant the suspicion of the truth flashed upon the quick-witted young fire captain.

"I think I've seen you before, haven't I?" demanded Wide, looking searchingly. "That was when you had a somewhat different face. Didn't your name used to be Jimmy Hunt?"

The woman uttered a stifled little cry, falling blindly away, for she expected her brutal husband's vengeance to be swift and terrible.

But Hunt had swiftly decided to try to bluff it out.

In an assumed voice that he tried to make very soft, he replied:

"There is some mistake here, young man."

"It hardly seems probable," Wide replied. "Though you've taken off your beard, lightened your hair and put panes of glass over your eyes, there's something about your face that looks very familiar on a close look. Even your voice, though plainly disguised, makes me think of Jimmy Hunt. And why is this poor woman so frightened?"

Wide's one purpose was to make the fellow take to his heels before he had time to do the woman harm.

If Hunt ran away, our hero was confident that he could pursue swiftly enough until the fellow ran away from captors.

Once Hunt was away from the woman in danger, Wide would not be slow to raise a yell that would bring people their way.

Yet all the time Halstead watched the hand that Hunt had thrust under his overcoat.

If he tried to draw a weapon, the young fire captain felt that he was close enough to leap upon him, seizing his pistol wrist.

Oddly enough, Jimmy Hunt did not seem to want to run away.

He may have suspected the boy's plan.

So, without looking at the woman, Wide suggested:

"Mrs. Hunt, won't you leave us?"

"No, she won't!" snapped her husband, in a much more natural voice that Wide was quick to note.

"Ah, that time we had the real voice," mocked the young fireman.

"Confound you, Halstead!"

"Make your escape quickly, Mrs. Hunt," Wide urged her. "There's going to be trouble here, and it's going to start soon!"

"You bet it is!" cried Jimmy, in a rage.

Out came his right hand, gripping the revolver.

He tried to spring back far enough to be able to use it, but Wide was watching.

Our hero sprang forward just in time, gripping Hunt's right wrist ere the fellow could swing the muzzle around.

"You won't use that thing!" hissed Wide, struggling to twist the fellow's wrist.

As Hunt slipped, Young Wide Awake managed, by a lucky twist, to get possession of the weapon.

Just as Hunt let go, however, the weapon was discharged.

The bullet struck a knot of a tree, glancing away harmlessly.

Poor little Mrs. Hunt huddled closer to the same tree, too terrified to move or to cry out.

As the weapon came fully into Wide's hand, he leaped back, holding the muzzle against the fellow.

"Get back and behave yourself!" Wide warned, "or I'll drill you!"

"Shoot away!" sneered Hunt. "There was only one cartridge in that gun!"

Wide pressed the trigger, but there was only a click.

Hunt was upon him now, striking out with both fists, while the young fireman tried to defend himself.

Mrs. Hunt had sunk to the ground, in a half-fainting condition.

Jimmy now succeeded in getting at close quarters, and in wrapping his arms around the young fire captain.

For a few seconds they struggled like wild beasts.

Then, under Hunt's greater weight, they went down to the ground, rolling over and over, in a fierce struggle for the mastery.

"Take that!" panted Wide, who had gotten the revolver now, by the muzzle.

He succeeded only half-way in striking the blow that he aimed with the butt of the weapon, for Hunt warded it off somewhat.

Then, as Hunt tried again to wrap his arms around the panting young fireman, Wide succeeded in hurling the revolver across a yard, through the glass of a window.

He did this because he was afraid his enemy would get the weapon again and beat him insensible with it.

"Help! help!" yelled Young Wide Awake, as he battled in that tight embrace.

Yet he had little hope that help was near, if that revolver shot did not bring any one.

"There'll be no help get to you, in time!" hissed Jimmy Hunt, as once more he succeeded in bearing the young fire captain to the earth and tried to reach his face.

Wide read a fearful purpose in his enemy's eyes as he strove to get out from under that hostile weight.

CHAPTER X.

NEPTUNE DIRT.

At last Hunt got a grip against the boy's wind-pipe. Wide strove to shake it off, but could not.

He grew rapidly weaker, now, for lack of air.

Mrs. Hunt had passed into almost a complete faint.

She did not move, for terror had absolute mastery over her.

Just as Wide felt that he was losing all sense of what was going on around him, and as Jimmy Hunt's hoarse panting came triumphantly to his ears, there was a sound of running feet.

"What's going on here?" demanded a young fellow, as he dashed up.

It was George Mathiesen, of Washington No. 1.

Instantly that spirited youngster leaped forward, catching Hunt with a blow in the face, as that scoundrel tried to get to his feet.

Then Mathiesen dodged, backing off again, to gain time, for he saw that his opponent was much too big a fellow for a stand-up fight with him.

"Police!" yelled Mathiesen, as he aimed another blow at Hunt, then dodged once more.

He was perfectly fresh, while Hunt was panting a good deal.

That enabled Mathiesen to keep out of the way for the first few moments, during which time he did not cease yelling for the police.

Wide, with the first rush of air into his lungs, found himself coming back to a sense of his surroundings.

He crawled to the fence, raising himself by holding on to the wood.

Wide felt like cheering when he saw Mathiesen drive in a blow that landed on Hunt's chest, staggering him for an instant.

George tried to follow up the advantage, but Hunt leaped forward, succeeding in getting a body hold.

Then they swayed, and went down together.

Though Mathiesen fought like a panther, Hunt was now able to use his greater strength and weight in a fashion that was using the young Washington up quickly.

Halstead now felt better fitted for the fray.

Slipping up behind Hunt he hit him a blow on the head that sent him pitching forward.

As our hero followed it up, Mathiesen slipped out from under his foe, getting slowly to his feet again.

He came in all grit, though he was rather badly used up from the pounding he had received.

With his two adversaries, however, Hunt, who had not escaped unharmed himself, decided that things were coming too fast to suit him.

He made a dash past them, taking to his heels.

After him ran Wide and George, as fast as they could go in their damaged condition.

In flight Jimmy Hunt had the better of it.

Mathiesen's yells had brought a couple of citizens, but when they saw Hunt heading at them at full steam they stepped discreetly aside.

"After him! Catch him!" yelled Wide.

The two citizens ran with the boys, though they kept behind our friends, making up for their lack of speed by much yelling.

Hunt had gotten around a corner, and had disappeared by the time that a policeman came sprinting up.

Wide gave a swift idea of what had happened, and described Hunt's present appearance as he, Mathiesen and the policeman searched the neighborhood.

Then, finding the chase not a promising one, our hero called to George to go back to Mrs. Hunt with him.

That terrified woman had been pulling herself slowly together.

The two young firemen helped her to her feet.

"We'd better go back to the house of your friends, I guess, madam," the young fire captain suggested.

Mrs. Hunt had hired a special policeman to watch over the safety of her children for the present, but that officer was now absent on his evening airing, Mr. Ellis taking his place with the children.

The Ellises had been just too far from the scene of the fight to notice either the shot or the yells for help.

Mr. Ellis was greatly astonished and enraged.

"We've got to get that scoundrel the first thing we do," he declared. "Captain Halstead, won't you and your friend take Mrs. Hunt to the police station, where she can tell just what happened. I'll stay here to make sure the youngsters are safe," he added, with a grim look at his revolver and the bulldog.

So Wide and George escorted Mrs. Hunt to the police station.

Chief Sharp took them into his private office.

"If there's any way of getting that scoundrel, we'll try to do it," he declared, earnestly. "But, in the meantime, Mrs. Hunt, you have no right to remain around Belmont. In spite of our best-made plans, that worthless fellow may get you, or one of your children. You've got money enough. Why don't you escape, and keep dark, until we've had time to catch Hunt?"

"If I went anywhere else," shuddered Mrs. Hunt, "he'd only follow us."

"He can't, if he doesn't know where to follow, can he?"

asked Sharp, in a low voice. "See here, you ought to go to-night. Make up your mind where to go. If you left here on the train, Hunt might hear where you had gone. He might even, by some chance, be aboard the train, or get on at the next station—especially if he's trying to escape from here. But suppose you leave here on a fast automobile, and travel thirty or forty miles from here, and then board a train? He can't follow your auto, and he won't know where it took you, nor where you went after leaving the auto. By daylight to-morrow morning you can be two hundred miles from here and in safe hiding, without all the terror that hangs over you now."

Nor did it take Mrs. Hunt long to realize how much safety such a move promised.

She agreed to flight by this plan, Chief Sharp pledging himself to have the auto call for her, and to have one of his men, in plain clothes, put her aboard a train at a distant station.

"Now, you young men," said Chief Sharp, "escort Mrs. Hunt to her home. At the same time, I'll have one of my men trail you, to be handy in case Jimmy Hunt should have the cheek to show up. You'd better remain at the Ellis house until Mrs. Hunt and her children have whizzed away in the auto car."

It seemed the most sensible thing to do.

Wide and Mathiesen returned with the now hopeful woman, and remained outside the Ellis home while she hurriedly prepared herself and her children for the journey.

Chief Sharp timed his movements just right.

By the time the car stopped at the door Mrs. Hunt and her two children hurried out.

No time was lost. The passengers hurried aboard, there was a quick whirr-rr, and the car was down the street and out of sight.

"They ought to be all right now," muttered Mathiesen, in a low voice, to Wide.

The two young firemen went back to the fire station.

Terry had gone out with Hal and Joe. Mathiesen took a seat in a game of dominoes, so Wide decided to go out and look for his chum.

Having received no severe bruises in the fight, and having suffered most of all from the choking, Wide now stepped along briskly enough.

He was a bit sore about the neck, but otherwise did not much feel the effects of his meeting with Jimmy Hunt.

Halstead strolled along for some distance up Main street, then crossed to the other side.

Before long he came face to face with Fred Parsons, who gave him a scowl.

Wide halted, looking frankly into the other's face.

"Is there anything wrong, Parsons, that can be set straight?" he demanded.

"There's nothing that you can lie out of, anyway," was Fred's harsh rejoinder.

That sent the hot blood dancing to Young Wide Awake's face.

"See here, Parsons, I don't like that kind of talk."

"Little difference it makes what you like," was the retort.

"You've changed front suddenly, haven't you?"

"Do you remember what I told you the other night?"

"At the leap year dance, do you mean?"

"That's what I mean. You lied to me, then."

"Be careful!" warned Wide.

"Careful, nothing!" scoffed Captain Parsons. "If you don't like my plain language, I'm old enough to back it up."

"I wonder if I understand you aright?"

"You can, if you put your mind to it," sneered the Neptune commander.

Fred had both a desire to fight our hero, and a notion that at last he could win in such an encounter.

Parsons had been thinking over Halstead's style of fighting, and had decided that a quick, overbearing rush would do the trick.

"I've always been too cautious before this," Captain Fred decided. "What Halstead needs is someone to fight him hammer and tongs."

"I was in hopes that you and I, and the companies we command, could get along in decent style," Wide exclaimed, regretfully. "But if we can't, and you insist on being taught how to behave——"

"How to behave!" interrupted Parsons, sarcastically. "If that was what I wanted I'd go to a better teacher!"

Wide saw that nothing but real trouble would settle the matter, so he said, shortly:

"Lead the way, if I understand you, Parsons."

"Mister Parsons would sound better, from you, Halstead."

"That's one of the things we'll decide with our hands up," Halstead retorted, drily.

"Come on, then."

Parsons turned into the side street, leading the way for two blocks and a little more.

Here they came to an unused yard, containing only an old barn.

"I don't think we'll have any meddling here," observed the Neptune commander, coldly.

His mind was on the trouncing that he hoped to be able to give his ancient enemy to-night.

"Going to strip?" asked Wide, calmly, as Captain Fred drew off his overcoat.

"Just my two coats and my cuffs."

"That's enough for me, then."

Parsons prepared himself in silence, until he had his hands up.

"Come on!" he challenged.

"You start first. I guess I can catch up," mocked Wide.

Parsons, after one or two false moves, started in with his "hammer-and-tongs" attack.

It was bad judgment—just the worst style in the world to use with a fighter of Wide's tricks.

The Washington boy jumped nimbly about, keeping out of the way of the quick, heavy blows, and watching his time.

That chance came.

Wide darted in under his opponent's guard, landing a hard blow that threatened to mash Captain Fred's nose all over his face.

Parsons could not help letting out a roar of pain, as he backed off, holding up a hand to his nose, which was bleeding freely.

"All you want?" Young Wide Awake queried, calmly.

But Fred, with another roar, as he lost his temper, leaped blindly in, hitting right and left.

The blows came so fast that Wide had either to run, get hit or knock his enemy down.

He chose the latter course.

Parsons hit the earth hard, and chose to remain there.

"Have you got all you came here for, Parsons?" the Washington captain inquired.

Captain Fred growled out an indistinct answer.

"I didn't understand your reply," Wide followed up, coolly.

Two young men going by on the street heard the voices.

"Why, that's Halstead," said Keating, quickly.

"And thumping Parsons," returned George Boxton.

"Come on! We've got to see what's up."

Both Neptunes darted swiftly into the field.

"So we've caught you, have we, Halstead?" snarled Keating. "Come on, Boxton, we'll teach this Washington mucker a lesson!"

Wide had his hands full, in an instant, for the two Neptunes sailed into him from either side.

CHAPTER XI.

HUNT GETS AN INNING.

"Pound him, fellows! He needs it!" raged Captain Fred, sitting up, as the fight started.

Wide could have thumped either Neptune, and then the other after him.

Two at the same time, however, offered a rather large proposition.

Wide strove to knock Keating out, but, while he was doing this, Boxton came in hard on the other side.

Captain Fred saw his chance, too.

Though he was a good deal used up, he had strength enough left for this style of fighting, so he jumped in, getting in a blow or two.

Of course Young Wide Awake went down before the combined assault.

Then the Neptunes fell upon him, giving him an unmercifully hard drubbing.

But Wide staunchly refused to call "enough."

He would not beg to fellows who were cowardly enough to take up this kind of fighting.

So the Neptunes hammered on until they felt that they had vented their tempers.

All of the sulkiness that had been smoldering within him for twenty-four hours Captain Fred now let come to the surface.

Then they fell to playing cat-and-mouse with the young Washington captain.

Three or four times they permitted Halstead to slip out from under them and start to get away.

Just as his escape was almost certain, they piled upon him, dragging him to earth again.

"Oh, you cowards!" panted Wide.

He had the satisfaction of landing one hard smash on Keating's face, though he had to pay dearly for the pleasure in another moment.

Though Parsons gratified himself with several blows, yet he managed to keep himself clear of our hero's fists or feet.

As there has to be an end to everything, so, at last, the Neptune boys tired of their uneven sport.

That was not, though, until Wide lay on the ground, nearly down and out.

"I guess we can let you alone, now, for the rest of the

night," announced Captain Fred, gleefully. "You'll ache enough to keep you in mind of us until morning."

What Wide wanted to say he didn't say.

He realized that any effort to talk back would be only to invite more hard punishment.

"We ought to have a kick or two, all around," proposed Keating, hatefully.

"Oh, leave him alone, now," ordered Captain Fred. "The fellow has had enough to teach him, if he's capable of learning anything."

Still Wide was silent. His head was swimming a good deal. One more blow would be enough to put him out.

Fred dressed slowly, for his trouncing had left him feeling none too husky.

Every time he looked at the prostrate Washington captain, though, Parsons' eyes glinted with satisfaction.

"Do you think he's too badly hurt?" whispered Boston.

"Too badly hurt? He couldn't be," jeered Captain Fred.

"I mean, do you think he'll be able to get home all right?"

"As soon as we're out of sight," predicted Parsons, "Halstead will be on his feet, crawling home. He'd start now, but he's afraid it would be the signal for more from us."

As soon as Parsons was ready, the three Neptunes quit the field together without looking back.

Wide was not quite unconscious.

As soon as he found himself alone, he lay looking up at the stars.

He knew this was no place to stay, yet his head was so dizzy that he did not feel equal to getting up at once.

As he lay there he heard a tread nearby.

Whoever it was that was coming, it did not matter much now.

So Wide lay without stirring until the newcomer bent over him.

It was Jimmy Hunt!

Now, Jimmy's eyes were about as wicked as eyes could be.

"Got you, and gave you yours, did they, boy?" jeered the brute. "I'm glad they left something of you, though, for now you've got to settle with me. I've been hindered each time before this, but I reckon I won't be now."

Chuckling, Hunt laid one hand on the young fire captain's breast.

With the other hand he forced a handkerchief into our hero's mouth, ramming the gag well home, despite Wide's fight against it.

"Now, over on your face you go!" uttered Hunt, rolling Wide over.

The young fire captain tried to resist, but Hunt's full strength was too much for him.

His hands tied behind him, and the gag fastened in his mouth, Halstead felt that he was wholly at the other's mercy.

"Just so we won't be interfered with," chuckled Hunt, "I'll take you into the barn yonder. There we can work our troubles out if it takes all night."

Picking the young fire captain up, and keeping back from the front of the lot, Jimmy managed to get his prisoner inside the barn without being detected by any one.

There was a bit of hay left on the floor at one point.

Hunt seemed to know where it was, for he carried his

captive there in the dark, dumping Wide down on the soft stuff.

Striking a match, Jimmy applied it to the wick of a dark-lantern that he took from one of his overcoat pockets.

Turning the lantern so that the light fell on the boy's face, Jimmy stood back in the shadow, regarding the young fire captain's face.

If Wide had thought himself losing his senses, he now found his mind made sharply clear by the presence of this new and vastly greater danger.

In fact, the danger nerved Young Wide Awake to renewed strength in every way. He had need of keen wits now!

"But for you," declared Jimmy, giving the boy a prod with his boot, "I'd have been at least ten thousand dollars in long before this. You've won every trick against me, except this last one. Now, I've got all the say. Understand?"

Wide couldn't answer, but Hunt glared at him as though he blamed him for the fact.

"Last move of all is," Jimmy growled, "my wife sneaks herself and the kids away in an auto that goes like lightning. You put that up, too. You must have, for you were with her to the last. Oh, I know all about it, you see, for I saw the big car start!"

Jimmy stood glaring down at his young enemy for a few moments, before he bent and removed the gag.

"Now, don't you make a noise," he ordered. "If you do, it'll be your last noise in this life. Halstead, tell me, and tell me straight, where my wife went and took the kids?"

"I don't know," Wide answered, in a low voice.

"Yes, you do."

"I tell you I don't."

That was the truth, for Wide and Mathiesen had taken pains not to hear Chief Sharp discuss that with Mrs. Hunt.

Jimmy gave him another prod with his boot.

"Boy," he warned, angrily, "I don't think you quite understand the situation. I mean to find that woman and the children. I'll never rest until I do. You can help me, and you've got to. Don't try to lie, either, for you won't get away from me until I find that you've told me the truth. Now, once more, where did they go? What's to be the end of their journey?"

"I don't know."

"Tell me, or I know where the end of your journey, Halstead, will bring you!"

"I've told you the only truth that I know about the matter," Wide insisted. "Nothing that you can do will change the answer any."

"We'll see about that," rejoined Jimmy Hunt.

Sitting on the hay beside his victim, he twisted one of Wide's bound wrists, tortured him at the funny bone, and inflicted pain in other ways, all the time warning the young fireman not to dare to make any outcry.

"Now tell me where my wife and the children went," insisted Hunt, stopping his torments at last.

"I can tell you only the same thing. I don't know," Wide insisted, dreadingly.

Jimmy Hunt sat back with an exclamation of wrath.

"Confound you, you're stubborn!"

"Or truthful," Wide ventured. "I'd tell you a lie, but

you've warned me it wouldn't do any good, as you mean to take care of me until you've found out whether I've told you the truth."

"You know, just the same, where they've gone," Hunt insisted.

"But I don't."

Hunt frowned, and was silent, in deep thought.

At last, fishing a length of cord from one of his pockets, he bent over, lashing Wide's ankles.

"Last chance to talk," he warned.

"It wouldn't do me any good," Wide replied.

"Then I'll get ready to fix you so you will talk," Jimmy retorted.

He crammed the gag home once more, making it securely fast.

Then he stood up, taking up the lantern and shutting the shield over the light.

Then he vanished into the night, making the door secure behind him.

Left alone, Wide began to move softly.

Even while Hunt had been there he had tried, stealthily, to loosen the bonds at his wrists.

Now he worked as hard as he could to get his hands out of the loops that held them.

Clang! clang! clang!

"There's one fire I'll miss, and have a good excuse for," muttered Young Wide Awake grimly to himself.

It seemed to him that he was working wholly against hope in trying to dislodge the cords from around his wrists.

Yet he never, for an instant, gave up the task, but tugged and twisted, over and over again, trying to get his fingertips where they could be used with good effect.

Clang! clang! clang!

The second round of the alarm was pealing in, now.

Wide could picture the scene at the fire house, with many of the fellows already togged, and ready to take their places by the running-ropes.

"How fine it would be to be there now!" muttered the young fire captain, plaintively.

Clang! clang! clang! The third round!

Very likely Washington No. 1 was bounding away from the fire station now, with Lieutenant Hal in the lead, and he and all the fellows wondering what kept their captain belated.

Ah! Wide gave a sudden throb of hope. The cords were giving about one of his wrists.

With the greatest patience, now, he worked until he had his hands apart.

How good it seemed!

There was a knife in one of his pockets, and with that Wide swiftly cut the cords about his ankles.

He had loosened the gag and was about to take it from his mouth, when the door opened.

Flare! The light of the dark-lantern shone again in Wide's eyes, blinding him.

Jimmy Hunt had returned.

CHAPTER XII.

CONCLUSION.

At the first sound of the door opening Wide had dropped on his back, thrusting his hands under him.

Fortunately, the gag was still in his mouth, though loose. Jimmy Hunt did not seem to perceive that fact, nor did he even glance at the boy's feet.

"Now," glared Jimmy, savagely, "I guess we'll find the way to make you talk!"

He bent down, removing the gag.

"Worked that pretty near loose, did you?" he snarled. "Lucky I got back when I did! Now, then, have you changed your mind?"

"I'll tell you all you want to know," Wide replied, meekly.

"Oho! That's the way to talk."

"As far as I can go truthfully," the young fire captain continued.

Jimmy frowned.

"Beyond that, I'll invent a few lies, Hunt, if that'll please you any, or help you out."

"So! Going to be just as sassy as ever, are we?" scowled the brute, making a threatening move with his fist.

"Don't be too hasty," urged Wide. "Wait and hear all I've got to say to you before you conclude to get mad."

"I'm listening, then," grunted the brute.

"You've blamed me for all that has happened," Wide went on, his sole object being to gain time.

"I should think I would! But cut that out and get down to business."

"Now," went on our hero, slowly, "if I should tell you who really has been to blame, and who has thwarted you at every step——"

"Cut that out, boy! You know what I want to hear, and anything else is worse than a waste of time. Come to the point, or I'll——"

But Young Wide Awake, straining his ears for the past few moments, now heard with a joyous throb the sound for which he had waited.

His feet suddenly shot forward, catching Jimmy Hunt's legs in a lock.

Over backward like a falling tree went the brute, while Wide, in the same instant, got painfully, but quickly.

Before Jimmy could make more than the first move, Young Wide Awake was racing for the door.

"Help, help! Washington No. 1!" he yelled, as lustily as he could.

With an oath Hunt started in pursuit.

He caught up just after Wide had thrown open the door.

With a jerk he snatched the young fire captain back just as our hero would have started across the yard.

Outside Wide's own fire company was going by.

There were those who heard his call for help, and these called out to the others.

Instantly several Washingtons left the running ropes.

Three or four of them, as they came, had the presence of mind to snatch down fire axes or pikes.

Terry Rourke led the way at hot speed with no weapon save a fire lantern.

Jimmy Hunt's own dark lantern had gone out in the upset, but Terry's own lantern threw its rays of light about in the barn.

Hunt, having yanked Wide back, realized how close pursuit was, and dashed out through the door at the other end.

Across the yard he raced, followed by the Washingtons, egged on by Wide's quick orders.

These lusty young firemen, in their fighting uniforms, proved too swift runners for Jimmy Hunt.

That worthy got as far as a corner in the high board fence at the rear of the yard.

He made a leap upward, only to have the hook of a pike caught in his overcoat.

In a jiffy he had been pulled back to the ground.

"That's Hunt, all right. Hold on to him!" sounded Wide's voice as the young fire captain came lamely forward.

"Bedad, av ye rise, me laddybuck," growled Terry, "ye'll have yure head chopped off wid fire axes for yure throuble!"

Finding himself surrounded by nearly a half-score of determined young Washingtons, the brute's nerve forsook him.

He knew that, in their present temper, if he offered any resistance, he would be more than half-killed.

"That's the very fellow we want," panted Wide, as he came up. "Take mighty good care, fellows, that he doesn't get away. Take him on to the fire and turn him over to the first policeman you meet."

Jimmy sullenly submitted to being led away, back to the street.

Hal, with the rest of the fire company, had kept on to the fire, which was barely more than half a block beyond the barn in which Wide had been held a prisoner.

It was a brisk little fire, that had started in a kitchen, after the family had gone to bed, and had spread to the dining room.

As the Neptunes responded to this fire, too, Chief Pelton felt that he had not a hard fight on his hands, for the wind was quiet to-night.

Jimmy Hunt's unwilling appearance caused far more excitement than did the fire.

The police officer to whom the prisoner was turned over promptly put the handcuffs on him.

Hal was already in command of the fire fighting for the Washingtons.

Wide saw no need of taking the command out of his lieutenant's hands, and so stood wearily by, an aching spectator.

At the outset, Terry found some work for his axe squad, but after a while came back to join his chum.

Then Wide told Rourke all about the cowardly assault on him by the three Neptunes, and what it had led to.

"Shure, they were doing ye a big favor, av they led yez to the capchure av Jimmy Hunt," said Terry. "But the evil spalpeens, they nade punishment just the same, and O'im thinking they'll be afther getting all thot's rightfully theirs!"

Captain Fred, finding Young Wide Awake present, had hurried off, to stand by his nozzlemen.

There came a time, though, when Parsons could no longer keep away from the rival he had treated so shamefully.

When reeling-in time came, Wide, accompanied by Rourke, walked over to where the Neptune officers stood.

"You see, Parsons," remarked Wide, icily, "you fellows didn't quite do for me."

"What are you talking about?" demanded Captain Fred, gruffly.

"Oh, in view av the witnesses thot saw yure dir-rtly wrong," broke in Terry. "'twill be har-rdly wurruth yure while to deny how ye and Keating and Boxton all jumped

on Wide, and left him all but dead, as ye must have thought."

"Who wants to deny anything?" demanded Fred, sullenly.

"Thin yez don't deny it."

"Not a bit of it."

"Thin we've thot much agreed on, out av yure own mouth," jeered Terry, "for Wide was the on'y real witness against yez."

Captain Fred paled for an instant, for he took this to mean that Halstead was going to resort to making a police court case of the night's business.

"There'll be some fighting, soon afther the machines star-rt away," declared Terry, "unless ye blaggards are afraid to stand up to yure records. But av ye thry to steal out av it thot way, thin we'll catch ye three at anny ould toime and take it out av ye."

"I'm hardly in good shape for fighting, now," objected Fred.

"Ye'll thry it, though, onless ye want to take three times as much at another time. And, av yez thry to back out av annything the night, then we'll pass yure name around iverywhere for a cowar-rd. Boxton and Keating will fight with yez, the night, av they've got the sand av aven the meanest kind av animals in thim."

The upshot of this taunting challenge was that, after the Washington and Neptune machines had been started homeward, a few young firemen from each company repaired to the same field where Wide and the three Neptunes had had their trouble.

But this time Fred, Gerald and George found themselves faced by Hal, Joe and Terry, with a few members of each company as spectators.

Within three minutes all three of the Neptunes had been thrashed to a standstill, and made to listen to insulting remarks about their cowardice.

"Ye fellers had a chanst to be dacint, but it didn't seem to agree wid yez," remarked Rourke, as he drew on his clothes again after the fight. "We don't want always to be fighting, but let the night's doings remind yez thot the Washingtons are as ready for war as for peace. Not thot a lot av blaggards like yez iver had anny taste for fighting thot was fair."

Though the hour was growing late, and though he was sore from head to foot, Young Wide Awake felt that he really would rest better through the night if he first went to the police station and made sure that Jimmy Hunt was at last securely behind bars.

Terry and Mathiesen accompanied him.

In the private office they found Chief Sharp, who had been called from his bed, and with him was the brute, Hunt.

"Jimmy," remarked Mr. Sharp, "is planning to take a long rest in one of our State institutions."

"You see," smiled Mr. Sharp, "we police had a little evidence that we hadn't told any one about. We have a woman who saw Jimmy come stealing down the stairs of that tenement house, just before the start of the fire in which you nearly lost your life, Wide. Then, besides, we found the groceryman who remembered selling Jimmy a bottle of coal oil. When we brought these facts up for our guest's consideration, Jimmy decided that he might as well make a clean breast of it all."

"Then you're going to put him through for arson?" asked Wide, eagerly.

"Nothing less," Mr. Sharp answered, drily.

Jimmy held up his head, with a touch of the old defiance.

"That's all right for now, Halstead. But you wait until I get out, and then see how I'll settle matters with you."

"The least punishment that a man usually gets for arson," said Sharp, quietly, "is about twenty years. A good deal can happen in that time. Some men, when they've been doing the lock-step for twenty years, find their spirits curbed."

"Twenty years!" Jimmy muttered, numbly.

"Your children will be of age, then, and handling their own money," observed Sharp, coolly. "Still, my man, I don't know that you'll be any worse off than if you had stayed outside the bars and drunk yourself to death."

Hunt's face was ghastly now.

"Isn't there any way to lighten this up a bit?" he asked, falteringly.

"After you're sentenced, replied the chief, "you may get a pardon from the governor. That'll be your only chance, as I can see."

Hunt buried his face in his hands, sobbing.

But he must have been looking through his fingers, for, suddenly, he sprang to his feet, upsetting Terry Rourke in his rush for the doorway.

His hands being handcuffed in front of him, Hunt was able to thrust the door open and to make a break for the street door.

Sharp leaped after him, but Hunt thrust a foot back, catching the active little police chief in the stomach.

Then on he darted into the street, with Mathiesen in close chase, Rourke just behind, and Wide and Sharp bringing up the rear.

"Out of the way, boys!" commanded Sharp. "I've got to shoot, if he doesn't stop."

Hunt faltered for an instant, then started on with a new burst of speed.

"Stop!" yelled the chief of police. "I get credit for being an extra good shot with a pistol."

Jimmy Hunt, with a last groan for his vanished liberty, halted, trembling.

Gulping down his sobs miserably, Jimmy Hunt was marched into the station house, and, without more ado, locked up in one of the cells downstairs.

"Don't be worried, Halstead," smiled the little police chief. "Jimmy won't get a chance to bother you any more."

"What's worrying me most," Wide replied, "is my aching body. I think I'll get home and between sheets as soon as I can. Good-night, chief."

"Good-night, Wide."

"Oi'm going wid yez," Terry informed his chum, as they stepped outside. "Av ye've anny av thot oil left, Wide, 'tis the fine rub-down Oi'll be giving yez before ye slip in bechune the sheets."

In his own room Wide stripped enough for Rourke to be able to rub down all the aching joints and bruised spots.

"Ye may be a bit sore in the morning, la-ad," observed Rourke, as he worked. "But 'twill be the aches av an honest la-ad. Ye'll not be waking up wid the heavy, sore hear-it av a villain like thot Jimmy Hunt. 'Twill be the corra morrow for the likes av him."

"I suppose Sharp will telegraph his wife that she can safely come back," hinted Wide.

"Av Oi were her," grunted Terry, "Oi'd not aven set foot in the same State thot held a brute loike Jimmy in a jail."

"Do you think he meant any of his threats to kill her or injure the children?" Wide asked.

"Me opinion, is it? Thin, I don't belave he knows, himself, whether he meant annything av what he said. 'Twas the liquor in him thot talked, and thot stuff takes the place av a man's brains whin he gets to leaning on it the way Jimmy Hunt did. Wirra, but won't he be having the dhry toime, twinty years widout it?"

"Wives have a queer name for standing by worthless husbands when they're in trouble," mused Wide. "I wonder if Mrs. Hunt will fly back to hire a lawyer to defend her husband, now he's sure to go to prison?"

Terry nearly dropped the liniment bottle in his indignation over the idea.

"Don't be dreaming," he urged, when he found his voice.

Nor did Mrs. Jimmy Hunt do anything anywhere near as foolish as that.

When she had sat in court, and had seen her husband sentenced to twenty years at hard labor, she went out with dry eyes and a flushed face, and soon after started life anew, with money enough, in a far Western town.

As for Wide, on account of his aches, he lay a long time awake that night, thinking over all that had happened in the last few hours.

He was more sorry about the way Parsons had broken out than over anything else that had happened.

"I had really begun to have big hopes of that fellow," he muttered. "But I'm afraid it will take him a long while to securely reach the point of decency at which most fellows start."

Then Young Wide Awake fell into a fitful slumber. Much of the time he dreamed uneasily.

It was late Sunday morning when he was awakened by the sound of a bell.

"The old fire bell?" he muttered. "Whew! But I don't feel like turning out to it!"

Then, as he became more wide awake, he began to laugh.

The sound came from church bells, carrying a morning message of peace over Belmont.

THE END.

A story of rare excitement, well spiced with romance and humor, is what we can promise our readers in "YOUNG WIDE AWAKE AT THE FIREMEN'S BALL; OR, PARADING IN THE FACE OF DEATH." It will be published complete in No. 91 of the "Wide Awake Weekly." Out next week! It is a thrilling story from the first page to the last, and true to the life of the doings of the Belmont fire lads and their friends. Be sure to get this great story! Next week!

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CHOICE READING MATTER.

From time to time most interesting historical relics come before the public through the medium of the auctioneer. The latest example of this is Queen Mary's house in Jedburgh and some old tapestry which it has contained. Jedburgh has many points of interest. It has the ruins of an interesting old abbey and some of the Jethart pear trees, which are believed to have stood from a period before the Reformation. According to Mr. James Tate, it had a strong castle at the highest part of the town, and some of the mansions were in the form of bastille houses, the defensive character being requisite as a protection against English invaders. Of these houses the most interesting specimen now remaining is one in which Queen Mary lay sick for some time after her ride of fifty miles over moor and moss to visit Bothwell at Hermitage Castle, where he had been wounded by the banditti of Liddesdale. The bed occupied by the Queen at the time of her illness is now at Abbotsford, having been presented to Sir Walter Scott. There is a mass of corroborative evidence of the Queen's visit. In his "History of Scotland," Buchanan relates the incident connected with Bothwell, as do many other authorities. The tapestry which covered the walls of the room is said to have been worked by the court ladies while they waited for the recovery of their sovereign.

The most solitary person in the world during working hours is the maker of roman candles. He occupies an isolated cell, somewhat like that of an old-time hermit, save that its precincts are more contracted, and nobody comes near him while he is engaged in his patient toil. The wages he gets are high, but not by reason of the loneliness to which he is condemned; he is paid for the risks he is obliged to take. The quarters occupied by this eremite artisan are a tiny house, which might almost be called a hut, with a floor space not more than six feet square. Standing by itself, at least sixty yards from the structure, the little building is of wood, of the simplest imaginable architecture. If it were to be blown up the financial loss would be almost nil—a point of some importance, inasmuch as its diurnal tenant is obliged to use considerable quantities of explosives in the business which engages his attention. For a roman candle is a sort of magazine, or repeating gun, with a paper tube for a barrel and balls of fire for projectiles.

Rattlesnake oil is preserved and prepared very carefully for use as a liniment in some parts of the world. Rheumatism and sore joints are the ailments in which it is chiefly employed. The fat is taken from the dead reptile and laid upon a cloth in the hot sun, from which the filtered oil drips into a jar. From fear that the reptile may be bitten itself, the clear oil is tested by dropping a portion of it into milk. If it floats in one globule it is regarded as unaffected. If it breaks

into beads and curdles the milk it is judged to be poisonous and thrown away.

The recent court held by King Edward and Queen Alexandra lends interest to the inquiry as to what it costs for a debutante to make her curtsy to the King and Queen. A certain amount of exaggeration has attached itself to the expenditure which is cited as necessary for a court outfit. The all-important dress may cost thousands of dollars, and tens of thousands of dollars; but, on the other hand, a very dainty little debutante at the last court only spent \$25 on her frock. It was made by a good dressmaker and the train was lent by a friend. A calculation has been made to decide the maximum and minimum cost of a presentation at court. There is, of course, practically no limit to the expenditure which might be involved. A gown may be sewn with real jewels. A petticoat may be fashioned of priceless lace. A feather fan may be adorned with sticks of gold. All that can be done is to take a fair average of the sum total which would be considered necessary by a society debutante. The minimum cost is a more difficult matter. The most rigid economy must be practised, and the greatest difficulty which will present itself will be to invest a comparatively small sum on the outfit and yet to compare favorably with the woman who has spent three times the amount. The fact that it is now possible to hire a court train has proved a veritable boon to many debutantes. The price varies from \$12 to \$30, but a very dainty train of chiffon, lace and touches of silver embroidery can be procured for the evening at a charge of \$15.

JOKES AND JESTS.

Church—Ever know a man to make money on a tip he got in Wall Street? Gotham—Can't say I have. But I've known men to make money on tips they have given.

In a small Georgia town live an old negro couple. The wife supports both. Uncle Zeke, says a writer in the Philadelphia *Public Ledger*, spends most of his time fishing in the brickyard pond; not that he expects to catch any fish, but "des to hab some harmless 'musement, chile." Aunt Mary takes in washing. One day one of Aunt Mary's patrons broached the subject to her, and suggested that she should not encourage her husband's laziness by supporting him in idleness, but Aunt Mary protested. "Deed, honey, mah ole man ain't lazy," she declared. "It's des dem scientific notions he got when he was a-wuckin' at de college." "But what have scientific theories got to do with his not working?" the lady demanded. "Got er whole lot to do, honey," Aunt Mary said, gathering up her basket. "Yo' see, dem ideas what he got was dat it wasn't healthy ter wuck after meals; an' he ain't been able ter figger out no way ter 'complish' dat, not yet, 'less he gib's up eatin', an' course he can't do dat."

The Friend—Bear up, Mr. Meanly; you'll get over it. You'll marry again. Mr. Meanly—I shall have to. I've got a couple of hundred visiting cards with "Mrs. Meanly" on them, and I'm not going to have 'em wasted.

"Yes, I think my son-in-law is going to be able to get along in the world." "Does he seem to have a proper appreciation of the value of money?" "I don't know whether you would call it proper or not, but he got my daughter to get married in her graduation gown and then he struck me for the price that her wedding outfit would have cost if they had waited till fall."

A certain well-known politician, it has been told, was out hunting, and lost his way. Night came on before he found a habitation. Finally he came to a fisherman's hut, and banged on the door. "Who's there?" came a sleepy voice. "Grover Cleveland." "Well, what do you want?" "I want to stay here all night," was the response. "All right, stay there."

The Tell-Tale Photograph

By John Sherman.

Some time ago a robbery from the person, attended with considerable violence, was reported as having been perpetrated in a retired spot in the suburbs of the metropolis.

An elderly gentleman had been discovered lying near the roadside in an unconscious state, his pockets rifled, and with every indication that he had been subjected to very rough treatment, and that robbery had been the object. As nothing was found upon him that could give any clue to his identity, the police were unable to communicate with his friends, and he was, by direction of the division surgeon, removed to the hospital, where it was found that his injuries were of a very serious nature, and at least three days elapsed before anything like an intelligent account of the occurrence could be obtained from him.

By degrees, and during lucid intervals, the following facts were elicited: He resided near London, about five miles from the spot where he had been found. On that day he had called upon one of his tenants, who lived about a mile distant, and who had paid him a quarter's rent in cash. In addition to this amount, he had a few pounds with him, making altogether about twenty pounds. He was wearing a gold watch, and he had also a few other articles about him of no great value. He stated that when he left his tenants to walk to the nearest railway station, about a mile and a half distant, it was nearly seven o'clock and dark.

When he arrived at nearly a quarter of a mile distant from the station, he was accosted by a man of stoutish build, and whose general appearance he minutely described. The man asked to be directed to some place at no great distance, and after being informed the way, still lingered, and, suddenly turning round, aimed a blow at the gentleman's head. The force of the blow was checked by his hat, but this was followed by others, until the old gentleman became exhausted, having struggled with his assailant vigorously, and shouted for help. As no houses were near, however, and the road was not much frequented, he was unheard. He remembered nothing more until he found himself lying on a bed in the hospital ward.

The case having been placed in my hands, I at once caused a description of the man to be circulated among the police, and also among jewelers, refiners, and pawnbrokers, accompanied by the makers' name and number of the watch. I had been about a week on this job, and could get no further with it, when I received a note from Mr. C—, a pawnbroker with whom I was acquainted, asking me to call upon him as early as possible.

I lost no time in complying with his request, when Mr. C— produced a bill such as is daily circulated among pawnbrokers, containing a description of stolen and lost property. He explained to me that his assistants always carefully scanned these lists, but that as he did not give much attention to the pledge counter, he did not always examine these bills. He had, however, casually taken up this list on the previous day, and had been particularly struck with one item, in which it was stated that special attention was requested to the following:

NOTICE!

A gold lever watch, open face, with seconds—makers' name Barr & Lund, Cornhill, London—likely to be offered by a man of the following appearance:

The general appearance of the man, his height, complexion, his dress, and some peculiarities of manner and expression were then given.

I at once confided to Mr. C— the fact that I was then engaged on the case, and sincerely hoped that as he had sent for me in relation to it, he had some information to give that would be of real assistance to me in my investigation.

"Well," said Mr. C—, "I am by no means sure that my suspicions are well founded, but I imagine I have at least

some slight clue to the mystery;" for I had told him all the circumstances as I have already related them here. He then went to a drawer, and taking from it a photograph album, opened it before me, saying, "Is that the man you want?"

From the first moment I saw the photograph I felt convinced it was the likeness of the man of whom I was in search. Instead of replying to his question I asked, "Where did you get this?"

"Well," said Mr. C—, "when I read the description of the man on that bill, he seemed to rise up before me. I could not divest myself of the idea that I had seen him, and that the general details of his appearance brought before my mind a familiar reality. I pondered the subject for some time, when the whole thing came to my recollection. I called one of my assistants and directed him to go to the warehouse and fetch me a certain photograph album pledged a few months since. I opened it, and soon found this photograph, and I at once saw—or imagined I saw—the individual described in the list. I lost no time in sending for you, as the most likely officer I know to follow the matter up, if there is really anything in it."

"Do you know the pawner of the album?" I asked; "and did this man"—pointing to the photograph—"pledge it?"

"I will tell you all I know," he replied. "I am well acquainted with the pawner—a female, a young, care-worn woman. My attention was directed to the photograph in this way. When the woman brought the album to pawn I was looking through it, when she directed my attention to this one, remarking, 'That is my husband.' You will notice," he observed, "that this is the likeness of a somewhat remarkable-looking man, and it left an impression on my mind which the description on the bill at once revived."

"Can you give me the address of the woman?" I inquired.

"I can. Here it is," he said, handing me a slip of paper with an address written upon it.

I was permitted to take the photograph with me, and bidding Mr. C— good-day, I took my departure.

As we frequently, in the course of our inquiries, have to make various excuses for calling at the houses where we hope to obtain some information, we are somewhat fertile in concocting reasons for so doing, and when I knocked at the door of the house in Swan street to which I had been directed, I had quite prepared myself with a plausible reason.

The door was opened by an elderly woman, who had the unmistakable stamp of lodging-house keeper upon her.

On inquiring if Mrs. Pritchard lived there, she surveyed me with rather a critical air, as if to glean my business, and then replied:

"She used to, but she has left."

"Do you know where she has gone?"

"No, I do not. I wish I did, for if ever I felt for a poor young thing I do for her. She paid me up all she owed before she left. But her wretch of a husband—he is a bad 'un, he is, idling his time away during the day, and just going out when all decent people think of going to bed."

Finding I could get nothing from the woman, my next step was to submit the photograph to the police officer, who had stated his readiness to identify the man he had met near the scene of the outrage. I accordingly looked him up, when he unhesitatingly recognized the likeness.

After some consideration, I determined to call upon Mr. C— once more. I soon found myself sitting in his snug little office, and after informing him of the departure of the man from Swan street, I asked him if he had many transactions with his wife and if she often visited the shop. He told me that she had been a frequent customer, usually bringing articles of her own apparel, and rarely obtaining more than a few shillings upon them.

"Can you inform me if she has any more articles in pledge with you now?" I asked.

"I will ascertain," he replied. "Of course, there is the album, and probably there are other things."

In a short time I was informed that there were several other parcels belonging to her still in the warehouse.

"Are you in want of an assistant just now?" I inquired.

"No. Why do you ask?"

"See here," said I—"suppose I were to enter your service for short time, just to be handy in case your customer called to whom some more of her goods."

"I see," said Mr. C—, smiling. "I think it might be managed."

So in a very short time I was stationed at a small desk at the end of the counter, with a pen behind my ear, and looking as much like a pawnbroker's shopman as I could.

I had previously secured the assistance of a reliable man, who often worked with me, to be at hand if I required his help.

It had been arranged that a certain signal should be given me if the woman called. An inkstand stationed on my desk was to be removed and placed before where she was standing.

And after three days' waiting, and occupying my time the best way I could, about eleven o'clock in the morning a neatly-dressed young woman entered a box, and, after looking through a packet of pawn tickets she had taken from her pocket, placed about half a dozen on the counter, saying she wished to redeem them.

As soon as the assistant had taken them he came to my desk, removed the inkstand, and placed it in front of the woman.

Without appearing to notice the circumstances I leisurely sauntered toward the door, signaled to my man, and instructed him to follow the woman whose appearance I described—telling him not to lose sight of her until he saw her enter what he might suppose to be her home. I gave him some money, and directed him to telegraph to me cautiously when he had reached his destination, as I expected he might have to travel some distance.

About seven o'clock that evening I had a telegram placed in my hand:

"From James Collier, Sussex Inn, Hayward's Heath.

"Have carried out your instructions. Am waiting for further orders."

To this I replied:

"Will be with you by first train to-morrow."

Early next day I packed up a few things in my portmanteau and started for Victoria station, and in due time reached Hayward's Heath. My man informed me that he had followed the woman to the station, saw her enter a train, and not being aware of her destination, told the guard that he was an officer, that he was watching a passenger going by the train, and would settle his fare when he alighted. This was readily agreed to. He entered the next compartment to that occupied by the woman, and, carefully noting each person leaving the compartment at the various stations at which the train stopped, saw her alight at Hayward's Heath. He followed her a short distance from the station, when he saw her take a key from her pocket and open the door of a small house. He then looked out for a place to stay at, and telegraphed as I had told him to do.

I soon ascertained that the woman was a lodger at the house, that she lived alone, and that no person had been seen to visit her during the time she had lived there.

The next morning I looked out for the postman, and saw him knock at the door of the house and deliver a letter—Mrs. Partridge (the only name I knew her by) taking it from him. After he had left the house, I went to him, and, informing him that I was a detective officer, asked him if he could tell me the post-mark that was upon the letter he had just delivered.

He replied that he had not noticed, but it was similar to several he had previously had for the same person, Mrs. Partridge.

Persons receiving letters usually answer them, I thought; something may yet be done. Toward evening I saw her leave

the house with a letter in her hand. I noticed it was in a buff-colored envelope. She went direct to the post-office and posted it.

I went in, inquired for the postmaster, and, showing him my card, explained to him that it was of the utmost importance that I should see the address on a letter just posted. He said it was contrary to their regulation, but they were allowed to make an exception in a case where investigations were being made by the police. He turned the letters out from the box, when I at once pointed out the one in the buff envelope, there being no others like it. The direction was:

"Mrs. Shepherd, Post-office, Liverpool."

I was soon on my way to London to catch the first train I could get to Liverpool; but with all my despatch I could not reach there until the following day. Leaving my portmanteau at the station, I hurried off to the post-office and inquired for a letter for "Mrs. Shepherd."

The clerk looked at me and remarked that Mrs. Shepherd usually called for her letters herself. I inquired if I could see the postmaster, and upon being introduced to him, I soon obtained permission to watch until Mrs. Shepherd called for her letters.

About ten o'clock next morning, a woman, apparently about sixty, with gray hair and wearing spectacles, asked if there were any letters for Mrs. Shepherd.

The letter was handed to her, a signal being given to me at the same time.

I was soon on her track. She walked very briskly through several streets, and at last turned into a house the number of which I carefully noted. I soon ascertained that Mrs. Shepherd occupied a room, and that the only other occupants of the house were the landlord, his wife and two children.

After watching two or three days, I noticed that she left the house only in the evening, and that she usually hurried home after making a few purchases.

Certain suspicions having arisen in my mind respecting this woman, I determined to test them, and accordingly the next evening, when she left the house as usual, I contrived to meet her, and, as if by accident, I stumbled and fell heavily against her. I will not repeat here the expressions she used. Suffice it to say that they were not of a kind usually to be heard from female lips, and the sound of the voice was unmistakably masculine.

Seizing her by the arm, I said:

"Shepherd—Partridge—or whatever you call yourself. I arrest you on the charge of highway robbery with violence, committed about two months since."

"You be hanged! You have made a mistake altogether," was the reply.

After considerable resistance, with the aid of a policeman I got my "man" to the station. He was brought up to London, and in due course sentenced to a long term of penal servitude. Although very little was known of him by the London or provincial police, beyond his being a suspected person, it was ascertained that he had been convicted in Dublin, and had also been in trouble in Scotland.

A few days after the trial, I waited upon Mr. C— and placed before him a check for twenty pounds I had received from the old gentleman. On searching the prisoner's room I had discovered the watch very carefully secreted. He had evidently been afraid to offer it for sale or pawn. Mr. C— insisted that I should have the reward.

"You, officer," he remarked, "have had all the trouble, and the credit is entirely your own."

"The owner of the watch has not forgotten me," I replied, "and has acted liberally toward me, but he considers, as I do myself, that you are entitled to the reward as the person who gave the information that led to the conviction of the offender and the recovery of the property."

"Well," said Mr. C—, as he turned to his cash-box, in which he placed the check, "as you will have it the reward is mine, I may at least do what I like with it. I will ask you to hand it for me to your excellent institution, the Police Orphanage."

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